OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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JACK THE NIPPER
8-BIT SHENANIGANS WITH GAMING'S NAUGHTIEST TODDLER





Feel the Burn!
BOMBERMAN
THE CREATOR OF HUDSONSOFT'S MOST FAMOUS CHARACTER REVEALS THE HERO'S EXPLOSIVE ORIGINS

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES
NOSTALGIA OVERLOAD AS WE REVISIT ONE OF GAMING'S GREATEST ERAS

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

OPERATION WOLF
EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT TAITO'S HIT ARCADE GAME

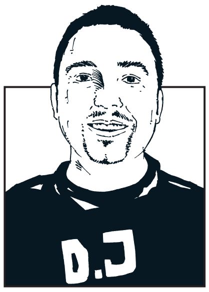
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HIGH FANTASY, CUTTING-EDGE VISUALS AND PATRICK STEWART

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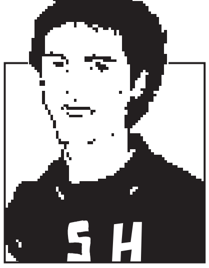
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THE RETROBATES

YOUR FAVOURITE HUDSON SOFT GAME?



DARRAN JONES
I'm going for *Devil Crush*, it's still an incredible pinball title with a killer soundtrack and I've just downloaded the PC-Engine version for PS3.
Expertise:
Juggling a wife, two children and **Retro Gamer** magazine.
Currently playing:
InFamous
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT
In terms of fun-filled hours spent playing any single Hudson Soft game, I have to hand it to *Super Bomberman*. I reckon I must have pumped a good month of my life into that game.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Red Faction: Guerrilla
Favourite game of all time:
Red Faction: Guerrilla



JASON KELK
It has to be *Star Soldier* on the NES, for no other reason than the simple, unadulterated blasting. I love a bit of blasting, me.
Expertise:
Killing odd things with other… odd things.
Currently playing:
Witch-bot Meglilo
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL
Because I'm old and contrary, and because I really don't want to say *Bomberman* (yawn), I'm going for the hard-as-nails but fun *Stop The Express* on Speccy.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Pinball Fantasies on iPhone
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK
I'm tempted to say *Lords Of Thunder*… But no, it has to be *Ys IV: The Dawn Of Ys*. Hudson made the best game in Falcom's *Ys* series.
Expertise:
Japan
Currently playing:
Demon's Souls
Favourite game of all time:
The *Zelda CDi* games



DAVID CROOKES
One of the first games I ever played by Hudson was *Bomberman* on Spectrum, attempting to whup the asses of my friends – 'attempt' being the crucial word. Loved it.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Beneath A Steel Sky
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY
Unquestionably *Bomberman*. Lifelong friendships can be forged or broken in a single round. I still get excited at retro events if someone has set up the Saturn version.
Expertise: The Panasonic JR200
Currently playing:
Hold Up (Tandy Handheld)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

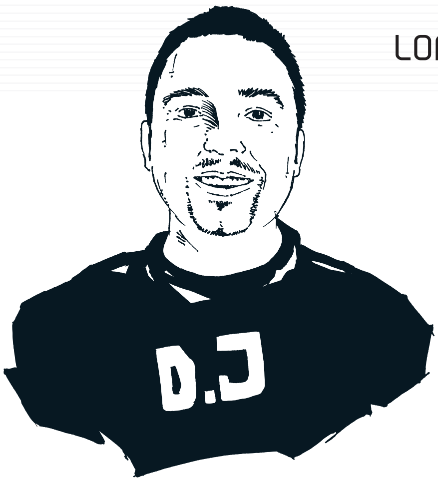


IAIN LEE
Bomberman Live on Xbox 360. It's wonderful and exciting to see 'the kids' playing a classic.
Expertise:
Pretending to be American while playing on Xbox Live
Currently playing:
Halo Wars – as an American
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Model B version)



PAUL DAVIES
Saturn Bomberman.
Expertise:
Banging my head against brick walls
Currently playing:
Ghostbusters
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts

LOADING...



We're often asked by forum members why we cover new systems in what is essentially a magazine dedicated to retro gaming. The short answer is why wouldn't we? Regardless of whether or not you think Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 or iPod Touch are worthy of inclusion in this magazine, the fact is they're all linked to the games of old. Sometimes it's via the extension of a classic franchise like *Resident Evil* or *Punch-Out!!* getting a new lease of life, but increasingly it's because of the benefits offered by digital downloads.

I recently downloaded *Final Fantasy VII* via PlayStation Network along with 99,999 other eager gamers. Does that make me a sell-out because I've opted for a brand new digital version instead of the original? Of course it doesn't. In this day and age it's just not practical for me to have a games room filled with different computers and countless videogame boxes – much as I'd love to – so digital downloads of classic games have become essential for me. Yes, it would be lovely to have the original box and that tactile feel you get from holding a cherished game in your hands, but ultimately I just want to play the games. If that means enjoying them on PlayStation 3, iPod Touch or XBLA, so be it.

Enjoy the magazine.





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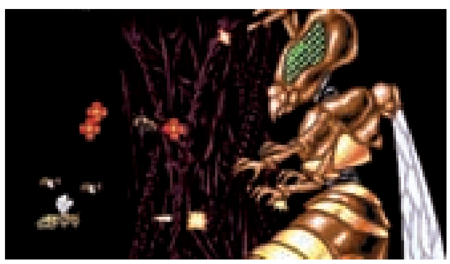
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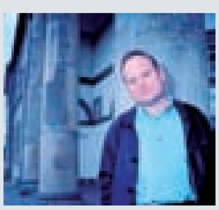


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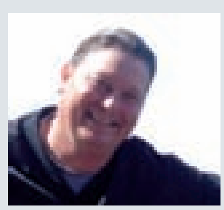
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We caught up with the co-founder of Revolution Software at this year's Videogame Nation event and fired ten essential questions at him. Turn to page 16 for the answers.



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The Sensible Software guru stops by to discuss the difficulties of creating the C64's *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit*. Can someone please make an **RG** level. Like now!



80 BOB FLANAGAN
You'll have played a lot of Bob Flanagan's games over the years and never even known it. We speak to the ex-Atari coder about *Gauntlet*, *Paperboy* and more.

"The consequences are so much more satisfying"

paranoid marvin

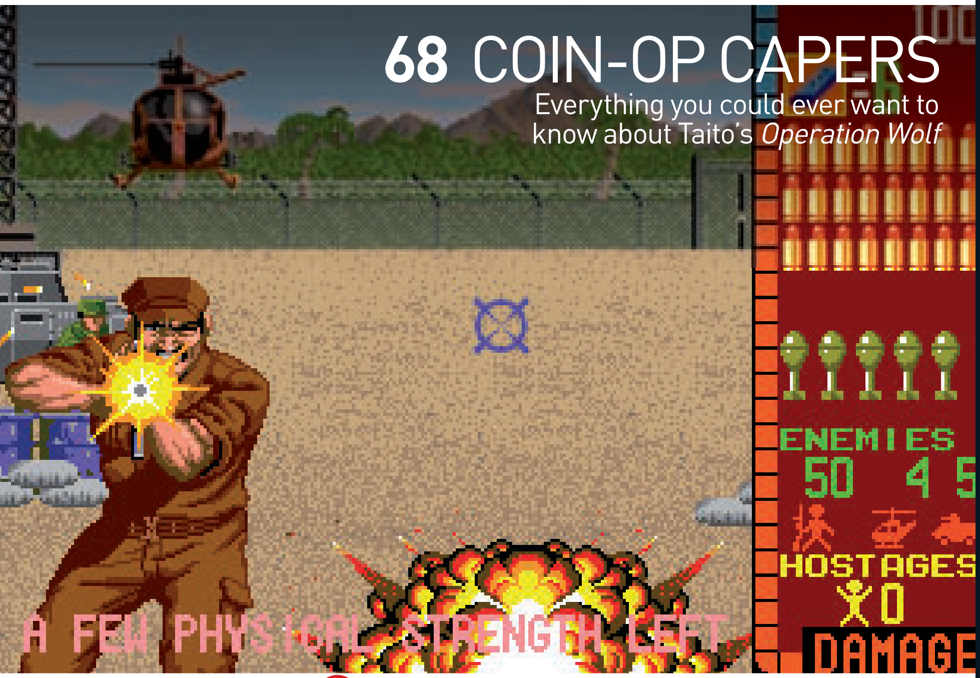


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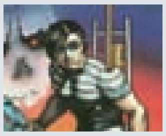
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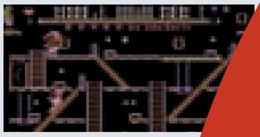
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Forum members have been asking for some C16 love, so Clarence Frank comes to the rescue with a look at *Bongo*.





ESSENTIALS

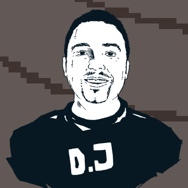
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retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» There's been a lot happening on the digital download scene this month, with Final Fantasy VII selling in huge numbers and Team17 finally revealing the details behind its new Alien Breed game. In other news, a Rare NES cartridge sells for silly money on eBay...

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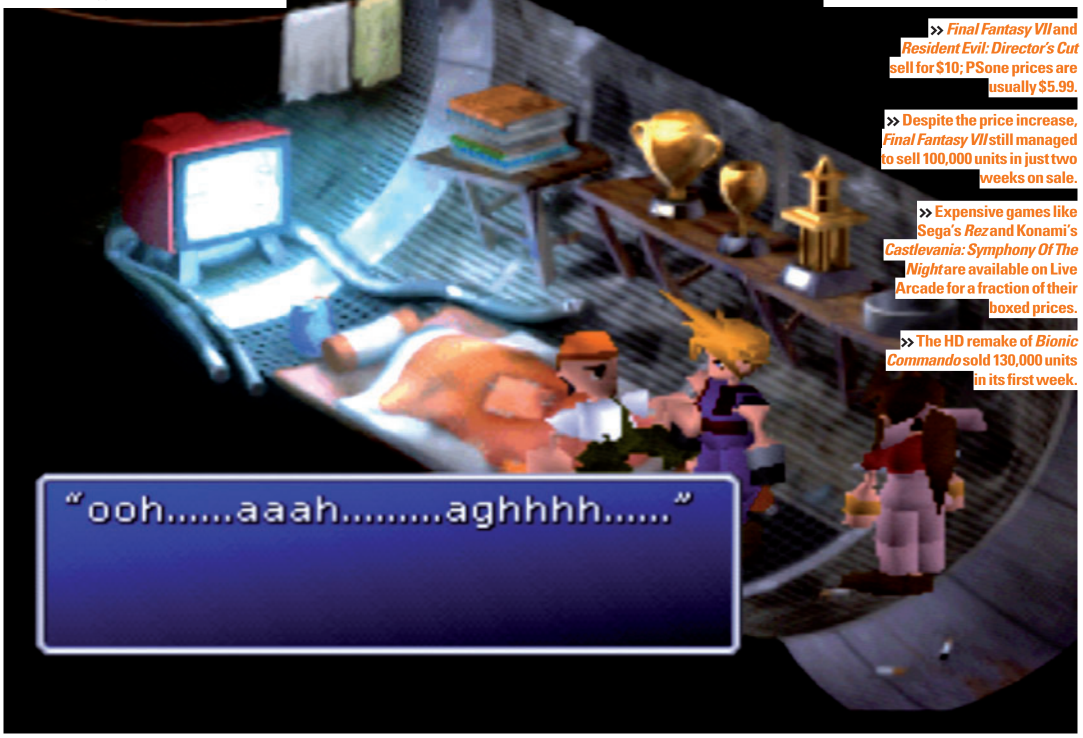
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We catch up with the man behind the *Broken Sword* series.

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Might And Magic heads in a new direction.

» [PS3] *Final Fantasy VII*'s long-awaited downloadable appearance has broken records.



✱ GO DEEPER

» ***Final Fantasy VII*** **and** ***Resident Evil: Director's Cut*** **sell for $10; PSone prices are usually $5.99.**

» **Despite the price increase,** ***Final Fantasy VII*** **still managed to sell 100,000 units in just two weeks on sale.**

» **Expensive games like Sega's** ***Rez*** **and Konami's** ***Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*** **are available on Live Arcade for a fraction of their boxed prices.**

» **The HD remake of** ***Bionic Commando*** **sold 130,000 units in its first week.**

SEVENTH HEAVEN

DIGITAL RELEASE OF FINAL FANTASY VII SELLS 100,000 IN TWO WEEKS

As the dust settled after another E3, it turned out it wasn't the heavy dose of motion-sensing trickery or pricey handhelds that sent pulses racing, but the announcement that *Final Fantasy VII* was coming back to the PlayStation. While it wasn't the remake that everyone was hoping for, a simple digital re-release was enough to sell over 100,000 copies in just two weeks.

Sony hopes that the appearance of the seminal role-playing game on the PlayStation Network will help revive the stagnant PSone Classics line, one that could hopefully take on the might of Nintendo's Virtual Console and finally catch up with the Japanese PSN store with its hundreds of PSone titles. Part of the strategy is to continue dropping big PlayStation brand names into the store, with the likes of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* all on the way or available.

So why only now has Sony started to push its back catalogue? With the download-only PSP Go just months away, the possibility of fighting Sephiroth on the bus makes for an excellent selling point for the system. It's also easy money for publishers: the Virtual Console sold over 10 million games in its opening year, and with the versatility of PSone games – playable on both the PS3 and PSP – they could yield huge sales for Sony.

Digital distribution isn't just great news for the shareholders. For gamers chasing rare or unreleased titles, they can now be made readily available online and for far lower prices, so those last minute snipes on eBay could become a thing of the past. Downloads are stored virtually, so boxes no longer take up precious loft space or have their battery-saves die on you, and they take seconds to boot up. They can also utilise today's technology, such as Backbone's ports that add Achievements and online play to Mega Drive ports. It's basically a cheap, versatile and convenient way of playing classic games.

> "Rare or unreleased titles can now be made available online and for far lower prices"

Avid collectors will obviously disagree, and they have a point. Choosing downloaded games from a menu is a sterile and empty experience compared to blowing into a cartridge and holding the boxed product in your hands, and it lacks the appeal of

Developer's opinions

» Insider thought on the digital interest in classic games



Simon Viklund, creative director of BC: R (Grin)

"I don't think retro releases or remakes can be categorised as good or bad for gamers. The consumers rule the market: if people want it, they buy it. One could make the argument that the development of retro/remake games robs the consumers of new IP and fresh concepts, but even the 'modern' game genres such as FPS are stuck in a rut anyway, so one can't categorise that as the direction for innovation. Who can say that a new IP is better entertainment than a remake? A new IP isn't necessarily more innovative. I definitely think there is a constant place on the market for retro. It's not a trend, it's a genre in its own right."



Rey Jimenez, producer of SF II HD (Capcom)

"Digital distribution of retro games can only be seen as a plus. It's a relatively cheap solution for publishers to get product to the hands of gamers and these are games they still want. With the advent of storage solutions on new consoles and faster download pipes, it only makes sense to adopt a distribution method that the PC market has embraced. The other option to distribute classics would be to create compilation discs, but this creates the problem of purchasing other titles in the collection that the user may not want. Like using iTunes, PSN, XBLA and the VC methods give the user total control of getting the games that they really want."



» [PSone] It's not available in the UK, but *Metal Gear Solid* is selling very well on the US PSN store.



using the original controllers. Releases are often poorly handled, with 50Hz speeds still haunting us after so many years, and emulation cannot run every game perfectly.

The bigger issue is that digital downloads have no physical value, so trading and selling games becomes impossible. Ownership is also up in the air, with PSN and Virtual Console restricting subsequent downloads on lost purchases and no clue if games can be transferred to the latest systems five, ten or twenty years down the line. And what happens when the servers are shut off for good? While this could be said of all digital products, the timelessness of retro games makes the issue so much more important. Can we get away without purchasing *Super Mario Bros* one last time?

Another use of digital services is not to simply revisit yesterday's classics, but to completely remake them with the hindsight of modern technology. Capcom has been spearheading this idea and so far has passed with flying colours. The recent *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* and *Bionic Commando Rearmed* tackle revered franchises in a new light, featuring redrawn high-definition visuals, online play, and as they're built from the ground up, it gives a chance to throw away stiff mechanics, tweak unbalanced features, and to erase glitches and bugs.

These retro remakes are much more a labour of love than straightforward ports, and the sales highlight this: *Rearmed* shifted 130,000 copies and *HD Remix* sold 250,000 copies in their first week, making the efforts of Cloud and his spiky-haired posse seem like short change. The fact that these titles could only exist via digital services, where low development and distribution costs don't make them a risk to the publisher and can easily turn a profit, put their direct competition – the originals – potentially under threat.

However, the awesome sales of digital ports and remakes show that they both have a place on the digital retail market, and this month's two other news stories follow the download-only trend. While there's the chance that modern consoles could make older games obsolete, instead it's giving them the biggest lease in life they've ever had. Classics are now easier to obtain and old favourites will return in bigger and braver ways, something that has both publishers and players very excited indeed. ✱

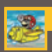
THE RETRO DEBATE

» What did you have to say about digital distribution?

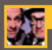
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Rinoa

I always buy the physical release if possible. I'm not a fan of digital media as it doesn't feel like it's a part of my gaming collection. Also, how long will I be able to play a downloaded game once all support for that console has ceased? I also don't like the fact that on some systems you can only download the game you've purchased a limited number of times.


Jet Pilot

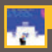
I prefer the original if possible, however with some games, particularly those that utilised a battery back-up function, I'll pick up the digital copy – sometimes in addition to the original copy – because I don't want to go through the hassle of replacing the battery, yet I want to actually be able to play the game as it was intended while still having the physical copy on my shelf. Also, if there is a downloadable game on a system I do not own then I'll stick with the digital version.


JetSetWilly

While I don't mind downloading retro games, you can't beat the feeling of tracking down that elusive title and holding it in your grubby mits, umm-ing and ahh-ing about whether to buy it – nine times out of ten, it was yes – then thinking, 'That looks quite fine on my shelf.'


HalcyonDaze00

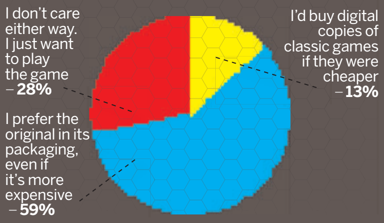
I love the likes of Xbox Live and the fact that you can download loads of old classics. For me this is a far better option than trawling round flea-ridden car boot sales in the rain and haggling with a local peasant as you try to knock 50p off the asking price.


sirclive1

Just wait, in a few years' time, if it does go down the download-only route, the only ones to benefit will be the big companies. You'll have no more independent games shops, hardly any games on car boots to browse through, no more Gamestation or Game unless they come up with some new ideas for buying downloads, and prices of downloads will just about match the price of games today that come complete with box, book, disc and physical value.

FORUM OPINION

What do you think of downloadable classics?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting *The Sunday Night* show on Absolute Radio at 10pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Decision Time

I have a spare room in my flat known as 'The Museum'. It's a wonderful place full of consoles and gaming machines from the past. I don't play with them as much as I should, but for me, part of the fun is collecting them and just knowing they are there. The ownership of the thing is equally, if not more important than the playing of them.

With a possible move on the way, I have to clear out a lot of stuff. And it was with a heavy heart that I looked around The Museum earlier today to try and decide what should go and what had to stay.

The obvious thing to get rid of is my huge pile of *Micro User* mags. I never read them when I was younger and a quick flick through shows me why – they are actually really dull. Example: September 1987, articles about sideways ROM's, Assembly Language and, ooh, multi-user mega-adventures. Hang on, that actually looks quite interesting, maybe I'll keep that one.

My stack of early **RG** mags are perhaps a little safer (about 60 of them), simply because I spent a bloody fortune getting hold of them. Imagine how pleased I was when a few months later I saw the whole lot had been released on disc. Thanks, guys!

But which consoles do I get rid of? The Beeb and Dragon are staying. They are my history. I had the crap kicked out of me because of them so they go nowhere. That'll learn the bullies. The C64 is safe because I always wanted one as a kid. Spectrum +2? It is fun I suppose, but I always feel I cheated by not getting the original rubber-keyed ZX. The QL, on the other hand, is a goner. Stunning computer, but as a gaming console, it just doesn't cut it.

The Vectrex is definitely sticking around. That's proper historical that is and a work of art to boot. And probably the one I play the most, as it's so easy to plug in and have a go on – even if you do have to wait five minutes for the screen to warm up.

I don't think the SNES has much chance of survival. I'd kind of drifted away from videogames when that was doing its magic and so it never really meant anything to me. I know a lot of the games are considered classics, but there's just something about it that doesn't really excite me, in fact it leaves me feeling a little cold. Dare I say it's a little over rated?

I had hoped that putting this all down on paper – or computer screen – might make my decision a little easier. It hasn't. It's actually made me feel like I'm trying to pick which of my children gets adopted – or put on eBay. Actually, that would be a pretty straightforward choice. It would be Tommy. He's a little sod and a pain in the arse. Yeah, perhaps I'll just get rid of my son and keep ALL the consoles.

Vectrex is sticking around. That's proper historical that is and a work of art to boot

Fave co-presenter – The delightful Kate Lawler, and not just because I saw her naked. She is the funniest person I've ever worked with and a lovely person. I miss her.



CLASSIC REVIEWER



BIO

Name:
David Swan
First Magazine:
Atari User
Role:
Freelance Writer/ Staff Writer/Skivvy
Favourite Game:
Pac-Man
Favourite System:
Not Virtual Boy

■ Favourite Game
If I were forced to pin one down, it'd be the original *Pac-Man* coin-op. Or possibly *TIE Fighter*. Or maybe even *Super Mario World*. Or one of several hundred others.

■ Favourite System
I've seen them all come and go over the years, and they've all had something special about them. (Okay, maybe not Virtual Boy.)

■ Best press trip you've been on?
A jaunt to Brands Hatch coincided with qualifiers for that year's Supertrucks GP. Standing in the pit lane while a hulking great rig smashes into the pit wall a dozen yards away gets the heart pounding, and not in a good way.

■ Best mag you've worked on?
It has to be *C&VG*. The team was a perfect blend of passion and insanity, and the quality of the writing, given the target audience, was bang-on.

■ Mag you'd like to work on?
A cliché perhaps, but either *Edge* or **Retro Gamer**. The former's still at the cutting edge of games journalism after all this time. And the latter is very dear to my heart. It still fills me with warm, fuzzy nostalgia every time I nose through it.

■ Best person you've met in the videogame industry?
I've met and worked with some great people over the years, and it would take a week-and-a-half to list and salute them all. On the flipside, I've also encountered some complete jerks, and I'd like to take this opportunity to blow a massive raspberry at the lot of them.

■ How have magazines changed since you started on them?
A lot of the sheer inane fun that seeped from the pages of the old mags seems to have disappeared, and as such the majority of them seem a lot blander (and, dare I say, corporate-minded) these days.



» [Xbox Live] *Alien Breed Evolution* has been confirmed for both Xbox Live and PSN, with the first instalment hatching this October.

ALIEN BREED DIGITALLY REBORN

TEAM17 FINALLY LIFTS THE LID ON ITS DOWNLOADABLE UPDATE TO A SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

After teasing its return last year, Team17 has finally revealed details of one of its most revered franchises – Alien Breed. The self-described 'retro modern' remake will actually be a trilogy of releases, all made available via digital distribution.

Alien Breed Evolution will be powered by the Unreal Engine 3 but won't jump on the first-person bandwagon. The top-down mechanics return, with a campaign that supports both single-player and co-operative play online. For those who have softened over the years, three variable difficulty settings allow you ease yourself back into the alien-exterminating ways of your youth.

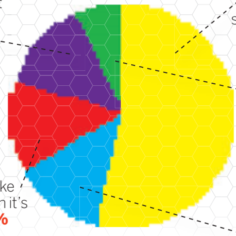
Team17's esteemed studio director, Martyn Brown, said the veteran developer wasn't afraid to be inspired by today's most atmospheric examples: "There's a gulf of difference between something that's our own and something that isn't," he told Imagine Publishing's **NowGamer** website. "We've ended up with something that's kind of a mish-mash of *Dead Space* and *Diablo III*, which is a really nice place to be."

But after more than 17 years away from the franchise, is the Yorkshire-based developer up to the task? Having been in development for 15 months, with a 30-strong development team and £1.8 million budget that makes it one of the most expensive downloadable projects to date, they seem confident that it will put the studio back on the map, like the original did all those years ago. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Are you looking forward to Alien Breed?



When you said it uses the Unreal engine I thought FPS, but it seems like an isometric third-person game – excellent! As long as the camera is fixed in up-close so we get claustrophobic corridors with the potential for alien swarms to come pouring through at any moment, this should be one worth watching out for **– paranoid marvin**

If they stick to the same or very similar style then yes. One of my all-time favourite game series. I really hope they don't feck it up **– markopoloman**

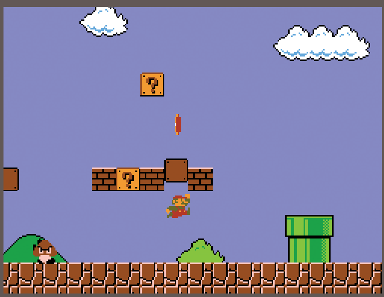
MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Asteroids movie incoming

A motion picture of the 1979 classic *Asteroids* is in the works. Universal Pictures fought off competition from three other studios to secure the rights, with *Transformers* producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura already attached to the project. We've no idea how a wireframe ship and a series of floating rocks will translate to the big screen, but let's hope it has a better script than most game adaptations.



» Got a spare $17,500?

JJ Hendricks was more than happy to spend a staggering $17,500 for a super rare Super Challenge NES cartridge on eBay recently. Despite the fact it only features time trials of three - all right, two - popular NES games, Rad Racer, Super Mario Bros and Tetris. Don't go looking in your lofts for a copy though, as it was a price for winners of a competition in 1990 and only 26 cartridges exist.



» Innex's third-party Nomad

Innex, who released the Retro Adaptor reported back in **RG** 65, has developed its own portable Mega Drive. The Retro Gen is essentially an affordable version of the Sega Nomad, complete with a cartridge slot, TV-out function, a rechargeable battery via USB and even an SD card slot for downloadable games. Although it lacks a two-player controller port, at $49.99 it's a well priced US import.

retroradar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Duke Nukem on iPhone

3D Realms may have shut down, but corporate goings-on won't faze the Duke. MachineWorks, the team behind the excellent *Prey* port, is bringing *Duke Nukem 3D* to iPhone any day now. A combination of on-screen buttons and tap-to-shoot controls will see Duke through the entire game, and those keen to see how the wise-cracks work on the move, should head to the App Store.



» Donkey Kong Secret Finally Revealed

Last year, Landon M Dyer, coder of the Atari 2600 port of *Donkey Kong*, revealed that he put in an Easter egg but forgot how to unlock it. Dan Hodges has gone to the trouble of actually finding out what it was: after triggering the right score and number of lives, the initials LMD will appear on the title screen. We're not sure if that's worth the 26-year wait.



» Daggerfall goes free

To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the *Elder Scroll* series, Bethesda Softworks has made the second title, *Daggerfall*, free to download on its website. Only those with a DOS emulator, 150MB of hard drive space and a few hundreds hours of free time need apply though. With servers hammered several days after release, it's great to see it's still hugely popular. Get it at www.bethsoft.com.



» [PC] LucasArts has one of the most illustrious back catalogues of titles in the history of videogames.

"We hope our fans are excited. This is just the beginning"

ALL ABOARD THE STEAM TRAIN

LUCASARTS RELEASES ADVENTURE CLASSICS ON STEAM, WITH MORE ON THE WAY

For years the humble adventure genre has been crying out for a comeback. With the recent surge of interest through Telltale Games' excellent episodic products and the burgeoning digital distribution services that act as the perfect vehicle for delivery, all that was needed was for LucasArts to sign on the dotted line.

The point-and-click giant will release its back catalogue over Steam, and all as cheap as chips. Adventure classics *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, *Loom* and *The Dig* are now available for a mere £2.99, alongside *Star Wars* titles *Battlefront II* and *Republic Commando*, with more poised for release.

"This effort is going to make it possible to introduce a whole new generation of gamers to LucasArts' classic games," said Darrell Rodriguez, president of LucasArts. "It also gives more people a chance to play our games by making them available long after they've disappeared from store shelves. We hope our fans are as excited as we are about our plans and we can't wait to share what's coming next. This is just the beginning."

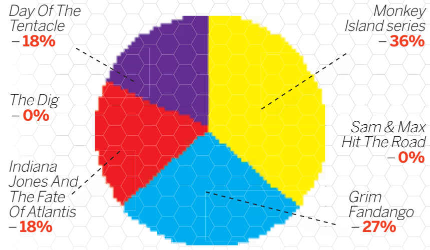
For fans of SCUMMVM, the news comes at a price. Available only as self-running executables, the games run perfectly through Windows but cannot be booted through the trusted emulator, meaning they cannot be played on a Mac. However, if this means that titles such as *Grim Fandango* can run properly on modern systems, then it might be a small price to pay.

While it's just a small team working on porting the games over, we'll wait as long as is necessary to replay the likes of *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Full Throttle* and *Monkey Island* once more. It's just surprising that it's taken this long for one of the strongest back catalogues in the industry to resurface, but it's better late than never, we guess. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What LucasArts classic do you want to see on Steam?



"I'd be much more inclined to buy if they were on GOG.com minus the DRM"
– Antiriad2097

"I'd prefer *Grim Fandango* as it's the only one I can't already play with SCUMMVM"
– TwoHeadedBoy

"£2.99 is an awesome price. For sensible download pricing alone they deserve credit"
– Dudley



ADIOS EIDOS

EIDOS SWALLOWED BY SQUARE ENIX

We've witnessed the recent demise of Midway Games and the downsizing of 3D Realms, but another publisher has now succumbed to the current recession. Although Square Enix initially bought Eidos in April this year, the Japanese publisher stated that business would continue as usual. This is no longer the case and Square Enix has recently revealed that Eidos will now be known as Square Enix Europe, thus marking the end of another great British publishing era.

Formed in 1990 by Stephen Bernard Streater, Eidos initially specialised in non-linear editing and video compression for systems like the Acorn Archimedes. Before long, the company set its sights on the game industry and began snapping up the likes of Simis, Domark and Big Red.

In 1996 Eidos acquired CentreGold and with it Core Design, therefore giving it access to popular franchises like *Chuck Rock* and *Tomb Raider*. The company appeared to be going from strength to strength, but by 2004, with a slew of successful licences – ranging from *Hit Man* to *Commandos* and *Legacy Of Kain* – under its belt, rumblings of a takeover were beginning to circulate.

Despite interest from Elevation Partners, SCi eventually purchased Eidos for £74 million in 2005. Trouble continued to follow Eidos/SCi and the company eventually revealed losses of £100 million during its 2008 financial report. Step forward Square Enix, which, thanks to its recent £84.3 million purchase, now owns a variety of development studios including Crystal Dynamics and Io Interactive. Aside from the renaming of Eidos to Square Enix Europe, the Japanese publisher has made no other announcements (although rumours abound that *Tomb Raider* will be the first Eidos brand to receive a reboot). *

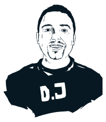




» [Xbox 360] Lara's reportedly on a new adventure that allegedly plays like a cross between *Gears Of War* and *Resident Evil*. More news as we get it.

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



Like Atari, Eidos lived on in name only, but it's no less of a blow to the industry. With so many smaller devs biting the dust, it's worrying to see one of the bigger publishers disappear. Hopefully the restructure will benefit everyone.

Stuart



While it's a shame to hear that one of the last remaining British publishing houses is forced to close its doors, a small part of me is interested to see what Square has planned for the *Tomb Raider* and Hit Man franchises.

Craig



In all honesty, I can't say I've ever got into any Eidos games, and so the demise of the publisher as a standalone organisation doesn't really bother me. The IP will live on through Square Enix for those who want it, but not me.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite next-gen games remade, retro style

Subject No 4

Left 4 Dead

EVERYONE LOVES ZOMBIES, so it should come as no surprise to learn that Valve's *Left 4 Dead* already has a sequel in the pipeline. A desperate battle for survival against hordes of vicious zombies, we challenged Ovine's Smila (Trevor Storey to his mum) to re-imagine the game as a past Spectrum classic. As always Smila done us proud and duly delivered a brilliant parody of the excellent Xbox 360 and PC blaster. In fact, it's so good we'd kill to see it turned into an actual game.



» [ZX Spectrum] So this is what happens when you cross lots of zombies with *Gauntlet*.

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Lost Art

Great artwork drew me to games. From Taito's monster *Space Invaders* illustration to Namco's vivid *Pac-Man* characters, everything by Ultimate, and of course Jet Set Willy's unforgettable box art.

Out last month, SNK Playmore's *The King Of Fighters XII*, with its full-on celebration of hand-drawn 'dot' characters and background art, has re-lit the fire under this obsession of mine. And I think there's a wider reason why such captivating man-made visuals connect more deeply with me than standard CG. And I'm sure it's central to the appeal of retro games.

Until sitting down to write this month's column, I couldn't quite explain why the majority of modern racing games, stealth action and first-person shooters don't really do it for me, especially when I've always made time for *Ridge Racer*, enjoyed *Doom* and *Quake*, then more recently *Gears Of War*. But of course it's because the games I mention have a distinctive look and feel created by artists, not engineers. I dare say that one of the reasons *Pro Evolution Soccer* keeps its faithful audience while *FIFA* is so much more realistic is precisely that: having Konami's artists add a touch of human expression to help capture the personalities of the players and a sense of match-day atmosphere makes you believe that Konami cares that little bit more.

A few more examples of great games, unmistakable for their dashing good looks include *Parappa the Rapper*, **Retro Gamer** favourite *Castlevania Symphony Of The Night*, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* – indeed all the early Lucasfilm adventures, even *Star Fox*. These are all fantasy scenarios, of course – it's not like you could digitally capture real situations – but what I'm driving at, pleading for perhaps, is that game designers remember that artistic direction goes beyond the packaging and menu screens. Want to know why *Drake's Fortune* looks so tantalising on PS3? It's because the textures are all hand-drawn.

Of course it's getting harder for artists to create a unique look after so many years, but the hand-drawn world of recent PS2 A-RPG *Odin Sphere*, and Namco Bandai's decision to recruit a known manga artist to front its *Tales Of Vesperia* on 360 were stand-out games in overcrowded markets. I think Sony has it completely wrong with PlayStation Home and its Uncanny Valley inhabitants, compared to the jolly Mii characters on Wii and friendly Avatars on Xbox Live. That's not to knock Sony generally though – I love Toro the cat.

Games will eventually become digital-download only, and while high-street presence could completely vanish, with striking imagery there'll always be marketing – personalised Mii T-shirts, you name it. *The King Of Fighters XII* really deserves your attention this month, because the hand-drawn touch is getting like gold dust but is still a priceless commodity in my view. More impact is gained thanks to every frame being composed.

Nice work, SNK.



Captivating man-made visuals connect more deeply with me than standard CG

Favourite press trip: Nintendo Spaceworld, 1997 for the games. SCEE Japan tour 1997 for the privilege of meeting my heroes at Namco, Tecmo, and Square Soft… and a very posh hotel

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Mario Kart Radio Controlled Cars

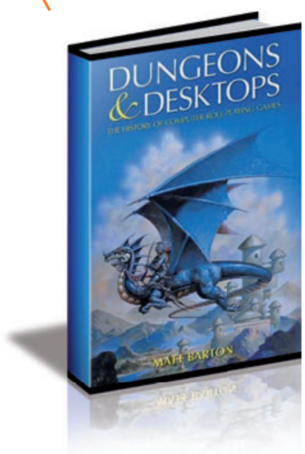
- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Impact
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Play *Mario Kart* for real with these funky toy cars and finally settle the argument over who is the fastest racer. Amazingly the carts themselves are at 1/32 scale (as if Mario and his kart are actually real).

Dungeons & Desktops

- **RRP:** £29.50
- **Publisher:** AK Peters
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

This originally started life as an in-depth online article and has since become a mammoth 451-page tome. Covering every single aspect of computer role-playing games, it's a fascinating read covering an oft-neglected but important genre of videogame's history.





Street Fighter 18-inch Cammy Statue

- **RRP:** £249.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sideshow Collectibles
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

You'd need to have a serious fetish for *Street Fighter*'s blonde bombshell Cammy if you're planning on picking up this particular statue. Yes it looks fantastic and yes she has a finely sculpted bum, but it's going to set you back over 200 smackers. Still, she certainly looks nice.

Hacking Video Game Consoles

- **RRP:** £19.99
- **Publisher:** John Wiley & Sons
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Benjamin Heckendorn is a genius and this book proves it. The talented modder's book has been out for a while now but is nevertheless essential reading, with step-by-step instructions on making portable versions of the Atari 2600, SNES and PlayStation. Essential reading.



NES Belt Buckle

- **RRP:** $30 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** The NES Buckle
- **Buy it from:** www.nesbuckle.com

Keep baggy trousers wrapped firmly around your waist with this fetching NES controller belt buckle. Or, alternatively, save yourself a few bob by cutting the wire off a broken NES controller and then gluing the pad to the side of a snake that died of natural causes.

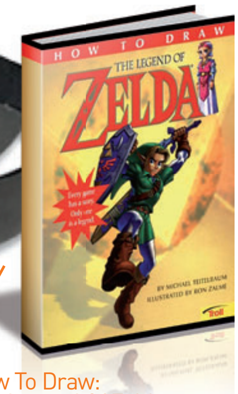


7-inch Alucard Figure

- **RRP:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** NECA
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Alucard is easily the coolest character in the *Castlevania* canon, so why not pick up this delightful scaled figurine? Brilliantly detailed and featuring accessories such as a leg of meat and some special weapons, it's a great model that effortlessly captures the spirit of the popular character.





How To Draw: The Legend Of Zelda

- **RRP:** £3.00
- **Publisher:** Scholastic
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

After last month's look at drawing general Nintendo characters, we've now progressed to Link and the Hyrule crew. While this once again features step-by-step instructions, its age – it was released in 2004 – means you won't find any sketches of Link as he appears in *Twilight Princess*. Our *Ocarina* Link has come along in leaps and bounds.



Plush 12-inch Sonic Collection

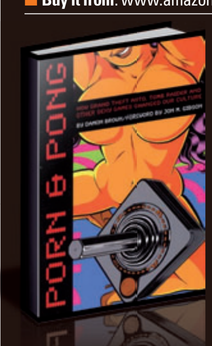
- **RRP:** £29.95
- **Manufacturer:** GOSH
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Everyone loves Sonic the Hedgehog, so why not cuddle up to this lovely collection of plush 12-inch characters? The inclusion of Shadow is a bit of a downer, but you could always undo his stitching, fill his body with stones instead of stuffing then send him to the bottom of the nearest lake. Result.

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Porn & Pong

- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Feral House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



Despite it's subtitle, this is a fascinating and often hilarious look at how videogames and porn have been intertwined for the last three decades. And it goes well beyond recent fare like *Grand Theft Auto* and Lara Croft. Covering everything from *Custer's Revenge* to *GTA*'s 'Hot Coffee' incident, *Porn & Pong* covers the topic with surprising good taste and offers up a fair opinion of the two industries. Oh and once you've finished it you'll never look at an Atari 2600 joystick in the same way again.

Retro Booty

T-SHIRT SPECIAL



Atari Joystick

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

Atari's 2600 controller is one of the most iconic around, so who wouldn't want to be seen proudly walking around with it emblazoned across their chests? We'd have preferred a logo like "Waggle My Stick" but that's just us.

Sonic The Hedgehog

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Seller:** www.play.com

No retro T-shirt section is complete without at least one image of Sega's blue mascot, so here's a funky effort from Bravado. It's sonic doing what he does best: running really fast, so stick it on and profess your love for the loveable hog.





Resident Evil

- **RRP:** £19
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Seller:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

Resident Evil 5 may not have been quite as amazing as the seminal fourth edition in the franchise, but at least the logo remains consistent. See for yourself with this stylish take on the Umbrella Corporation's iconic emblem.

Grand Theft Auto

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

A good T-shirt needs a smart, stylish logo and a clever catchphrase to make it really work. Needless to say, this *Grand Theft Auto*-inspired offering from Retro GT delivers on both levels. Now, where did we park your car?





Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Seller:** www.play.com

Amazingly, TMNT is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year so don't be surprised if you see plenty of merchandise appearing over the next few months. We'll probably just stick with this T-shirt and the excellent Live Arcade version of *Turtles In Time*.

Atari

- **RRP:** £27.50
- **Manufacturer:** Joystick Junkies
- **Seller:** www.joystickjunkies.com

According to the seven people we quizzed in the office, Atari's crest is the most iconic videogame logo of all time. Little wonder, then, that it appears on so many bloody T-shirts. This rainbow effort is particularly nice and it's officially licensed as well.





Salamander

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

If you ask us, there aren't enough shmup T-shirts around. Sure, you see plenty of *Space Invaders* offerings, but a four year old could come up with that design. Naturally, Darran went mental for this *Salamander* shirt.

Asteroids

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

In the future this T-shirt will have a holographic image that actually plays the game. For the time being we're perfectly happy with this static offering from Retro GT. And it ties in nicely with something we have planned for next issue…





Optimus Prime

- **RRP:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Seller:** www.hmv.com

Has there ever been a truly excellent *Transformers* game? We'll go out on a limb and give a resounding no. On the other hand there are plenty of cool *Transformers* T-shirts and this latest one instantly injects nostalgic memories of the comic and original cartoon into our brains.



8-Bit Monkey

- **RRP:** £24.99
- **Manufacturer:** Joystick Junkies
- **Seller:** www.joystickjunkies.com

We're confused by this. On the one hand it looks just like *Donkey Kong*, on the other it features a reference to a Madness song. Still, there's no denying it's eye-catching and we adore the banana-yellow colouring.

For more information please visit the following sites: **www.retrogt.com** **www.play.com** **www.joystickjunkies.com** **www.nerdoh.co.uk** **www.bravado.com**



Street Fighter II

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Seller:** www.play.com

Thanks to its fourth instalment, Capcom's *Street Fighter* is all the rage at the moment, so we've been eyeing up this stylish effort celebrating *SF II*. We'd have been perfectly happy with just Zangief, but having the whole gang on show makes this essential for fans of the franchise.



Terminator

- **RRP:** £19
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Seller:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

The *Terminator* films are synonymous with the games industry, so we thought we'd bring this Skynet top to your attention. Instantly recognisable, it might even improve your reflexes while playing the stupidly hard *The Terminator* on Master System, but probably not.



Amstrad CPC

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

As everyone knows, the Amstrad CPC 464 was quite possibly the greatest 8-bit computer ever made, so it's no surprise that you can get amazing T-shirts like this. Now you can promote Sir Alan Sugar's beautiful machine everywhere you go. There's a Spectrum one apparently, too.

Pac-Man: Chase Me

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Play.com
- **Seller:** www.play.com

Now, we've seen some brilliant *Pac-Man* T-shirts in our time, but this one always manages to raise a smile. Perhaps it's just fond memories of the game, but it's more than likely because we can hear Duncan Norvelle in our heads whenever we wear it.





Elite

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

Now, this is clever. What Retro GT has done here is take a well-known word from text speak and blended it with one of the most iconic 8-bit space trading games of all time. We're already imagining what it would look like on David Braben.

Boba Fett

- **RRP:** £17.00
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Seller:** www.play.com

Few *Star Wars* characters have had videogames based on them, but the mighty Mr Fett is one of them. Yes, we'll admit that it's one hell of a tenuous link, but look how bloody good this looks. Wear it with pride, bounty hunter.





Bubble Bobble

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Seller:** www.retrogt.com

Who can forget capturing every lettered bubble in Taito's classic arcade hit to gain an extra life? We certainly can't and we're even less likely to forget now we have this awesome T-shirt.

The Legend Of Zelda

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Play.com
- **Seller:** www.play.com

We asked seven people in the office what was the most recognisable videogame logo of all time and they all said Atari. We then went back to them a second time wearing this T-shirt and they still said Atari. Crazy fools.





Ghostbusters

- **RRP:** £24
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Seller:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

We've been absolutely hammering the hell out of *Ghostbusters* on PlayStation 3, so the giant nerd in us really wants to own this crazy looking T-shirt. The only thing that could possibly make it better is if you got a wisecrack from Bill Murray whenever you put it on.

Space Invaders T-shirt

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Seller:** www.play.com

This is one of our favourite T-shirt designs this month. Based on the original sprites and featuring a variety of colours, it's certainly eye-catching. We do prefer the original artwork (Darran has it on another T-shirt), but for a sprite effort this does the job.



★ A MOMENT WITH...

Charles Cecil

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month we met Charles Cecil co-founder of Revolution Software



» Cecil hopes his iPhone version of *Beneath A Steel Sky*, which features improved voice samples and animation of the original Dave Gibbons comic book intro, will appeal to fans and newcomers alike.

Who is Charles Cecil?

He's the man behind some of Britain's best point-and-click adventures, including *Broken Sword* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*, which is now out on iPhone.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers, and why?
Broken Sword: Director's Cut because its additional features – including hours of additional gameplay to expand the story, facial expressions to convey the changing mood of the characters, and an intelligent hint system to ensure that players don't get frustrated – take the game up a level.

What is your proudest memory?
In 1992 I claimed that our first title, *Lure Of The Temptress*, would reinvent adventure games. Our publisher, Mirrorsoft, arranged a press conference and, to my amazement, it filled up with industry dignitaries from around the world. I presented the concept of the 'Virtual Theatre', the engine driving the game. I came to the end… Silence. Then a Japanese man stood up and started clapping rapturously. Then everyone else stood up and started clapping. A queue of people wanting to know more soon formed.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
The early stages of game design are hard, but the hardest thing is to accept if an approach won't work, and throw it out. We've given up on several games after investing time and resources. Although difficult, it's always the right decision.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
Will Wright is bright and has consistently created innovative and interesting games.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
As interesting and innovating and maybe even that they contributed to moving computer games forward as an art form.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
GTA III was a genre-defining game. Innovative sandbox gameplay, compelling narrative, excellent pacing, tongue-in-cheek violence and strong style.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
To be a part of the development of an extraordinary new medium. To write games played by millions. And to be described as a "cool dad" by my children's friends.

What's your darkest memory of being in the game industry?
In 2004 we were in the grip of a severe hardware cycle downturn. Revolution had to scale back to survive. Almost everyone was made redundant, but they were all snapped up. They were an excellent team, and we now work with many on a freelance basis.



» *Broken Sword* has been released in extended form on Wii and DS.



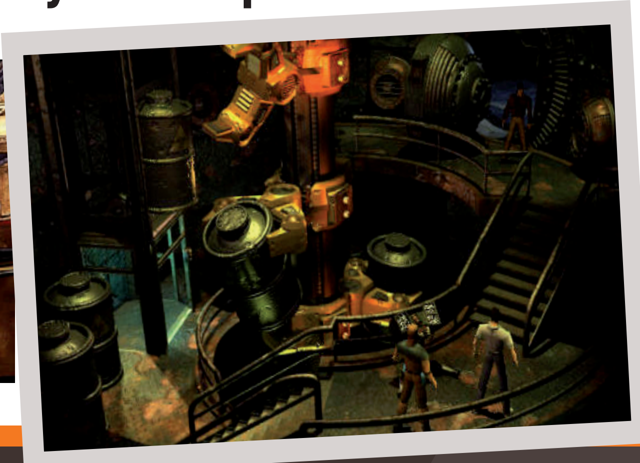
> **"Digital distribution and new platforms are shattering the cosy status quo"**

And your best?
By 2006 we re-emerged with a new structure based on developing games as a collection of partnerships with other developers and freelances. I won the Develop 'Industry Legend' award in 2006, proving the success of this approach.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
In the mid-Eighties I worked at Artic Computing and got a call from US Gold asking if we could write their World Cup game, *Mexico '86*, based on *Artic World Cup Soccer*. US Gold MD Geoff Brown drove to our ramshackle office in his Ferrari and, against my better judgement, our MD signed the deal. We could not, under any circumstances, tell anyone. When the game shipped, people realised what had happened. There was pandemonium. People who remember the game still label me as the culprit, which is wholly unfair.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
The industry was once driven by mavericks, who lived or died by their decisions based on instinct. Over time, the accountants took over and decisions were made by the committee as costs escalated. It was detrimental to innovation because the 'safe' option was always taken. This is coming full circle as digital distribution and new platforms shatter the cosy status quo and new opportunities are opened up. ★





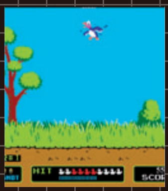
retrodiary

14 August – 10 September

» A month of retro events both past and present



15 August 1983
■ Konami's shoot-'em-up *Gyruss*, a melding or *Galaga* and *Tempest*-style games, is released into UK arcades.



15 August 1987
■ The simplistic and repetitive target-shooting game *Duck Hunt* is released on NES in the UK.



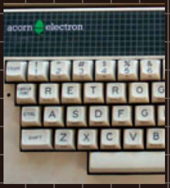
16 August 1982
■ Dragon Data enters the home-computing market with its Dragon 32 machine.



16 August 1984
■ The first issue of *Amstrad Computer User* magazine is published. *ACU* was originally only available as part of the CPC fan club.



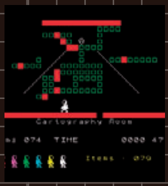
25 August 1997
■ A landmark day for N64 gaming as Rare releases its remarkable James Bond-related FPS *GoldenEye 007*.



25 August 1983
■ Acorn Electron is unveiled at the Acorn User Show held at the Cunard Hotel, Hammersmith. Yours for just £199.



17 August 1984
■ Richard Wilcox Software is renamed and relaunched as Elite Systems. Its first release is platform game *Kokotini Wilf*.



16 August 1985
■ Matthew Smith's Miner Willy returns to Spectrum with *Jet Set Willy II*, in essence and extended version of the original game.



28 August 2009
■ Get ready for some lightgun action as the *Mad Dog McCree* games head to Nintendo's Wii. Now where's *Lethal Enforcers* Konami?



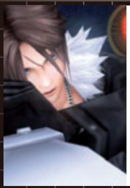
29 August 1989
■ NEC's TurboGrafx-16 console (or PC-Engine in Japan) is released in the US. Japan had already had theirs for two years.



1 September 1986
■ Sega unveils its newest arcade driving game *OutRun*. It was a massive hit with its hydraulic cabinet and sprite-scaling graphics.



1 September 1986
■ Distributed by Mattel, Nintendo's NES finally makes its UK debut. Japan got their NES in 1983…



4 September 2009
■ *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* is nearly here and pits some of the greatest villains and heroes from the series against each other in a stunning looking beat-'em-up. We can't wait.



2 September 1983
■ Incentive Software is formed and within weeks releases its first title, the scrolling maze game *Splat*.



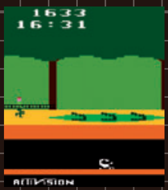
1 September 2005
■ Sony's handheld console, the PSP, arrives in the UK nine months after its release in Japan.



1 September 1995
■ *Rayman*, the 2D scrolling platform game, makes its first ever videogame appearance on Atari Jaguar.



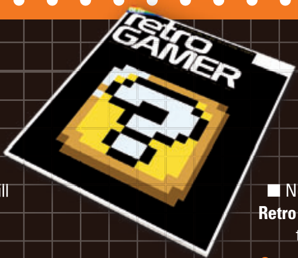
5 September 1983
■ Square Company Ltd, which later created the Squaresoft brand, is formed. It developed such delicacies as *Final Fantasy* and *Chrono Trigger*.



6 September 1982
■ *Pitfall!*, developed by David Crane and released by Activision, was released on the Atari 2600 console.



9 September 1995
■ Sony's PlayStation goes on sale for the first time in America. The UK must to wait till the end of the month.



10 Sept 2009
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

Retro Evolution

Looking at the classic franchises being revived for a new generation of gamers



1986

» **NAME:** MIGHT AND MAGIC BOOK ONE
» **SYSTEM:** C64
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** APPLE II, MSX, MOBILE, NES, PC
» **PRICE:** £9.99
» **PUBLISHER:** NEW WORLD COMPUTING
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PLAYERS:** 1

2009

» **NAME:** MIGHT AND MAGIC: CLASH OF HEROES!
» **SYSTEM:** DS
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £29.99
» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** CAPYBARA GAMES
» **PLAYERS:** 1-2

Might And Magic

The History Lesson

Up there with the likes of Ultima and Wizardry in terms of its popularity, the Might And Magic series has spanned an impressive 23 years and spawned more games and spin-offs than Gandalf has white hairs. Developed by American studio New World Computing, and created by the company's president and chief programmer, Jon Van Caneghem, the Might And Magic series began life in 1986 where it was released on the Apple II and Commodore 64.

It was a turn-based first-person role-playing game. The first title, *Might And Magic: Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum*, was set amid the fantastical medieval world of Varn, and its story was a clever mix of a traditional RPG plot fused with elements of science fiction. The game's story followed the tale of the four kings who rule Varn. One of the kings, however, is believed to be an alien imposter, and in the game your main quest is to use your party of six heroes to find the real king and stop the intergalactic doppelganger from initiating a potential alien takeover.

The 1988 sequel, *Might And Magic: Gates To Another World*, was developed from the same engine as the original, but boasted improved graphics, a larger world to explore and further dabbled in combining a typical adventure story with subtle sci-fi elements – this time by way of time travel. Three years later, in 1991, New World Computing released *Might And Magic III: Isles Of Terra*, which added multiple plotlines, completely rethought the graphics and control interface, and also introduced far more whimsical characters to the mix.

The next game, *Might And Magic: Clouds Of Xeen*, came along soon after in 1992, and used the same interface. However, it was notable for being a two-tier game – a companion title to *Might And Magic: Darkside Of Xeen*, released a year later. When both *Xeen* titles are installed they became a compilation title, fully unlocking the world of Xeen and even more quests for fans to embark on.

Following the abandonment of the 3DO console, 3DO looked to developing software for third parties and so purchased a number of developers. One of the studios it purchased during this 'buy up' period was New World Computing, and as part of the acquisition, 3DO acquired the rights to the *Might And Magic* franchise. Under 3DO, New World released a slew of *Might And Magic* games and spin-offs,



*** What we think**
Ubisoft is brave to move away from what the series is well-known for, but the new gameplay mechanics certainly sound interesting. Hopefully this will lead to a proper *M&M*, but for me, even a spin-off is better than nothing at all.



*** What we think**
I'm not against the idea of seeing the series dabble in the *Puzzle Quest* route as long as Ubisoft returns to the series roots eventually. Given its obvious passion for the franchise, I'm confident it will deliver something the fans will love.

Might And Magic Timeline

Might And Magic I
YEAR RELEASED: 1986
SYSTEM: C64





Might And Magic II
YEAR RELEASED: 1989
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

Heroes Of Might And Magic
YEAR RELEASED: 1995
SYSTEM: PC

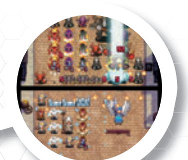




Might And Magic VI
YEAR RELEASED: 1998
SYSTEM: PC

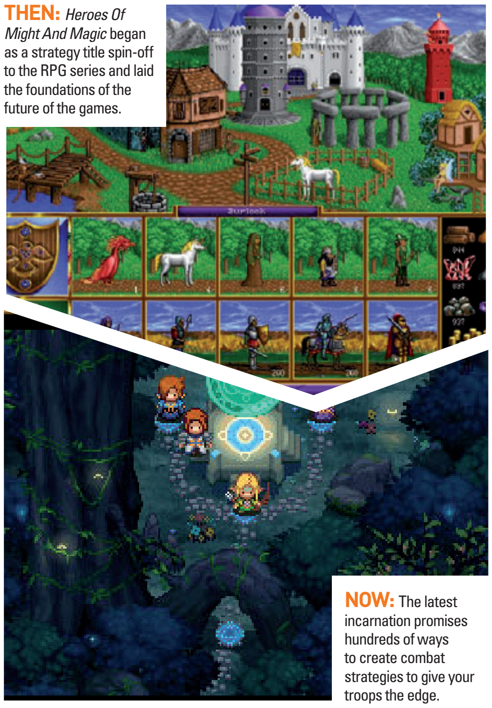
Heroes Of Might And Magic V
YEAR RELEASED: 2006
SYSTEM: PC





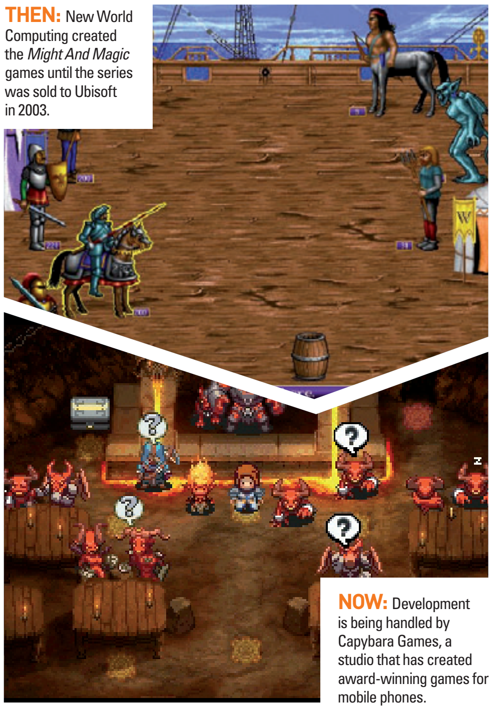
Might And Magic: Clash Of Heroes
YEAR RELEASED: 2009
SYSTEM: DS

What's Changed? The new additions that weren't in the original game



THEN: *Heroes Of Might And Magic* began as a strategy title spin-off to the RPG series and laid the foundations of the future of the games.

NOW: The latest incarnation promises hundreds of ways to create combat strategies to give your troops the edge.



THEN: New World Computing created the *Might And Magic* games until the series was sold to Ubisoft in 2003.

NOW: Development is being handled by Capybara Games, a studio that has created award-winning games for mobile phones.



THEN: The first game in the *Might And Magic 'Heroes'* series was an ingenious mixture of the RPG and RTS game.

NOW: The new title retains that sense of strategy but adds a new combat system inspired by puzzlers. You won't be able to put it down.

many of which experimented inside various game genres, examples include the third-person action title *Crusaders Of Might And Magic*, and the online team combat project that was *Legends Of Might And Magic*.

Such was the success and popularity of the franchise, New World also introduced a companion series to run alongside the FPS *Might And Magic* titles. *Heroes Of Might And Magic* (1995), was a strategy RPG that saw players explore a large game world, unlock various spells and treasures and cultivate and command armies made up of mythological beasts. Another high point of that 3DO era was the first game to come out of the new partnership, *Might And Magic VI*, which saw a significant change in the series by dropping the turn-based movement of old for real-time combat. However, shortly after the release of *Might And Magic IX* – often cited by fans as the worst game in the series – 3DO fell further into financial difficulty and was forced to close its doors, selling the rights to the *Might And Magic* series to Ubisoft in 2003 and sadly spelling the end for New World Computing.

While New World is no more, the *Might And Magic* universe has continued under Ubisoft. The French publisher's first *Might And Magic* release was *Heroes Of Might And Magic V*. Developed by Nival Interactive, it marked a return to form for the series and the first time that a *Heroes Of Might And Magic* title was built entirely in 3D.

More recently, Ubisoft announced that a new puzzle/RPG title is planned for DS. Developed by Canadian studio Capybara Games, who has award-winning experience in producing games for mobiles, *Might And Magic: Clash Of Heroes* is a brave direction for the series, one that is said to mix the gameplay and addictiveness of a puzzle game with the depth and variety of the turn-based strategy seen in the *Heroes* games. We caught up with the team at Capybara to quiz them about their new game, and hopefully discover what fans of the *Might And Magic* series can look forward to in this latest portable outing for the series. *



* What we think

I've never actually played any of the *Might And Magic* titles. American role-playing games usually bore me to tears. However, I thought *Puzzle Quest* was excellent so I might give this clone a chance.

THE PROBING QUESTIONS

We speak to developer Capybara Games about its puzzling take on the popular RPG series



■ Where did the concept for Clash Of Heroes originate?
We were just really excited to work on this fabled series. When the opportunity arose to work with the *Might And Magic* team at Ubisoft to craft a completely original handheld iteration of the series, we couldn't have been more excited. Our creative director, Kris Piotrowski, came up with a great concept for a hybrid puzzle/strategy game. After talking to Ubisoft, we mutually thought the concept effectively bridged the gap between bringing new gameplay to a DS incarnation of *Might And Magic* while staying true to the series' roots.

■ Why the move from strategy to puzzle?
The core gameplay mechanics are puzzle, but the tactics and goals are that of a TBS. So while it is a move to puzzle, strategy remains the focus of *Clash Of Heroes*, despite the fact that you use puzzle gameplay to get there. We are always looking for ways to make fresh games that take a step away from everything else you've played. We hope that's the type of game *Clash Of Heroes* is.

■ Any chance Clash Of Heroes will appear on WiiWare or another online service?
If I answer this either way, Erwan and Romain will fly to Toronto and murder me with their bare hands – in a nice, friendly way of course.

■ Tell us how Clash Of Heroes stands apart from similar games.
The similarities to *Puzzle Quest* are obvious… it merges RPG with a puzzle mechanic for battling. But I don't think *Clash Of Heroes* is quite like anything out there. The battle system is different – combining the addictiveness and cerebral elements of puzzle gameplay with the planning and execution elements of strategy. The adventure mode tells a great story and has you controlling five different heroes and their armies, across vast lands.

■ What have you done to ensure that fans of the original games will enjoy it?
The *Might And Magic* team at Ubisoft love the brand. They eat, sleep and drink *M&M*. They flew to Toronto and gave us an exhaustive look into the world of Ashan – far beyond anything we'd learned playing the games. We saw where the series came from and where it could go. In short, we got schooled. From there, our writer Dan Vader, and our designers Kris and Greg were in constant communication with the *M&M* team at Ubisoft to make sure we created something that *Might And Magic* fans would find both new and familiar. The fact that strategy is still the driving force behind the game is something that we hope will really resonate with those who love the original games.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

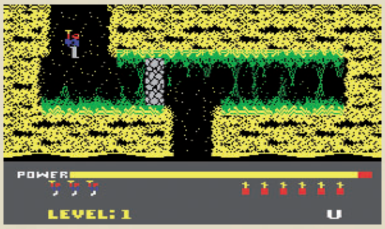


THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1987

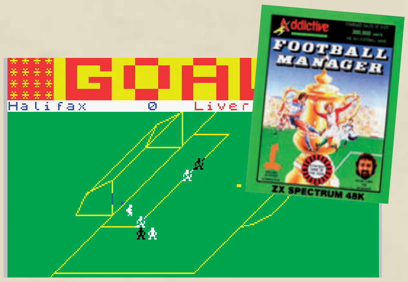
JUNE 1987 – Ultimate's Bubbler pops, Zombie Chicken no-show, a tale of two Road Runners, Boots and boobs don't mix, budget games galore and Jack has a ripping time. Richard Burton dons his cloak and takes in the night air around Whitechapel…



» [Amstrad CPC] *Professional Snooker Simulator*: Poke the white and sink the pink – careful not to go in off the brown.



» [Commodore 64] *H.E.R.O*: Adequate graphics but instantly playable and challenging. An excellent game and only £1.99.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Football Manager*: Repackaged and reduced in price, the old girl of football sims is back and still raking it in.

And so we come to the final chapter of the Ultimate Play The Game story. Well, the 8-bit home computer edition at least. With the recent release of the widely lambasted Martianoids, US Gold turned its attention and advertising machine to Bubbler, out later in the month, in what was the final Ultimate release.

Unfortunately for gamers, *Bubbler* mirrored *Martianoids* in many ways. It was available on Spectrum, Amstrad, and MSX, and it used a 3D-style view, which wasn't a patch on the Ultimate Filmation technique. It was also disappointing pap. Within a few short months the straight-to-the-bargain-bin *Bubbler* could be bought for just 99p from mail-order software sellers such as Shekhana, Castle Computers and Good Byte. If we only knew then what we do now, we could have bought in boxes of *Bubbler* safe in the knowledge they'd worth £50 a pop on eBay in 20 years' time. US *Fool's* Gold to US *24K* Gold in a manner of speaking.

Another legend bowing out was Matthew Smith. His last development for Software Projects, *Attack Of The Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars* (starring Zappo the Dog) was hailed as the big comeback game from the *Manic Miner* author. It was the exact opposite.

Heavily advertised in virtually every Sinclair-related magazine, the game was pulled just before release as it required some last-minute alterations. It later transpired that it was originally planned to be a version of the Warner Bros *Road Runner* cartoon. Unfortunately, the licensing agreement fell through so Software Projects had to rewrite the game. The Spectrum version was scrapped, but the C64 edition was modified and later became future Software Projects release *Star Paws*. It was then ported back to Spectrum where it was mildly successful.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Jack* The Ripper: The first 18-rated game in the UK. Presumably that wasn't for the graphics…

Elsewhere, US Gold was spending a fortune on double-page spreads throughout the computing press for its latest tie-in licensed acquisition. The game? A cartoon called *Road Runner…*

Palace Software's *Barbarian* hit the advertising nail on the head with the Maria Whittaker-encrusted inlay helping the game to sell extraordinarily well and also gain oodles of publicity. However, Boots the high street chemist/retailer, took exception to the excess boobage among its photo processing and sanitary towels and demanded the game be repackaged or else they would refuse to stock it. Palace, surprisingly, backed down and did just that.



» [Amstrad] *Prohibition*: A fast-paced and often overlooked target-shooting game. A fuss-free, atmospheric title.

Activision announced an agreement with Firebird to re-release much of its back catalogue on the Silverbird budget range. Such golden oldies as *Beam Rider*, *Decathlon*, *Pitfall 2* and *H.E.R.O* were available for £1.99 and would hit the shops at the beginning of the month.

In a similar deal, Mastertronic revealed it was distributing many of US Gold's older titles under the Americana label. Over 50 games would receive the budget treatment in the £1.99 and £2.99 price brackets.

Prism Leisure, after buying out Kevin Tom's and his company Addictive Software last month, decided to repackage and re-release his classic *Football Manager* on all 8-bit systems. Just £2.99 would get you Leyton Orient and Kevin Keegan…

Macsen Software, purveyor of crap TV tie-ins, sadly bit the dust due to financial difficulties during June. Among its output of dubious quality was *Eastenders* and *Treasure Hunt* (not featuring Anneka Rice's bottom).



» [Commodore 64] *Road Runner*: US Gold beat Software Projects to the punch for the rights to the *Road Runner* licence.

1987

JUNE NEWS



» Ashley J Williams sees nothing unusual about cutting your girlfriend with a chainsaw. Groovy.

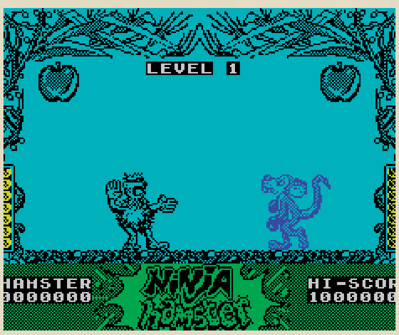
On 11 June Margaret Thatcher won her third successive General Election after beating off stiff competition in the form of Labour leader Neil Kinnock. It was the first time in over 160 years that a Prime Minister regained control for a third consecutive term. Thatcher won by a landslide (376 seats to Labour's 229) with the SDP Liberal Alliance of Owen and Steel barely making any inroads to Labour's position as the second biggest party. The PM later announced plans for the future, including the privatisation of electric and water companies and plans to introduce a new tax to replace the rates system, the much-heralded (and hated) Poll Tax.

29 June saw the worldwide premiere (in the UK, for a change) of Timothy Dalton's first of two outings as James Bond. *The Living Daylights* finally introduced the tougher, darker side to Bond that had been lacking through the Roger Moore wisecracking, eye-raising years. Dalton also starred in *A Licence To Kill*.



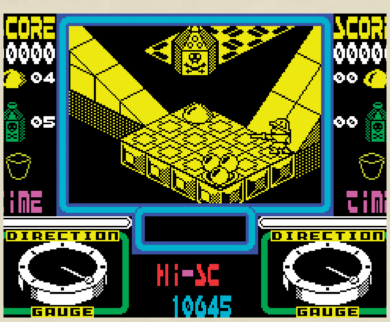
» Thatcher wins again. Now, get yourself ready for the Poll Tax, you lucky voters.

Contaminating the silver screen with a smear of scarlet was Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead II*. Released on 26 June, it saw Bruce Campbell once again take on evil as hapless hero Ash. Finding himself in the same cabin in which his friends were annihilated in the first movie, he battled demons and gained a chainsaw for a hand. Groovy.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Ninja Hamster*: Pick a martial art and a random animal and you have yourself a game. Next month: *Tai Chi Tuna*.

CRL revealed two new titles, both of which it hoped would be ready within two months. They were also very different projects. *Jack The Ripper* would be a strictly over-18 affair: a graphic adventure featuring plenty of blood, snot and meaty mutilations based on the infamous Victorian serial killer of old London town. The game itself became renowned for being the first ever computer game to be awarded an 18 certificate by the British Board of Film Classification. Not even Maria Whittaker's fun bags achieved that feat. Although the advertised "horrific" graphics were more hyperbole than gore-fest, the atmospheric location descriptions set the scene, conjuring up more shivers than the graphics ever could in what was a first-rate adventure for Spectrum, CPC and C64.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Bubbler*: The bubbler had certainly burst for US Gold. This offering was Ultimate Play The Game in name only.

CRL's second release was *Ninja Hamster*, an ass-kicking rodent taking on evildoing foes such as the dreaded Lizard of Death. It was an amusing premise that promised much more than it delivered.

The *Computer & Video Game* reviewers had two Games Of The Month for June: *Nemesis The Warlock* (Martech, Commodore 64) and *Barbarian* (Palace Software, Amstrad). The *C&VG* Hit recipients were far less prevalent than in previous months with just three: *Arkanoid* (Ocean, Atari ST), *Into The Eagle's Nest* (Pandora, Commodore 64) and *Professional Snooker Simulator* (Codemasters, Amstrad) feeling the *C&VG* love.

Spectrum-loving *Crash* struggled to find quality among the releases, awarding just three Smashes to *Hydrofool* (Faster Than Light), *The Pawn* (Rainbird/Magnetic Scrolls) and *Shadows Of Mordor* (Melbourne House).

Commodore counterpart *Zzap!64* didn't fare much better with another Gold Medal-less month and just two games receiving everlasting Sizzledom: Zenji (Firebird/ Activision) and Zolyx (Firebird).

Amstrad Action either had better titles or more lenient reviewers. *Ranarama* (Hewson) took the Master Game award with the AA Rave going to *Leaderboard* (US Gold), *Legions Of Death* (Lothlorien), Vulcan (CCS), *Prohibition* (Infogrames), *Rasterscan* (Mastertronic), and *Asphalt* (Ubisoft).

THIS MONTH IN...

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



The master of graphic adventures with BBFC age restrictions, CRL's horror game *Frankenstein* was previewed with an interview with its creator, Rod Pike. Rod didn't even want to do *Frankenstein*, instead favouring a *Wolfman* adventure. CRL didn't agree, but Rod got his way a year later…



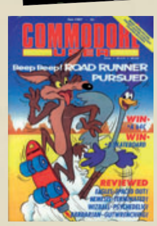
SINCLAIR USER



Sinclair User had its new *Outlands* feature, a kind of two-page LM-style section covering comics, arcade games, movies and… burgers. Congrats to McDonald's for having the "tastiest" quarter pounder (for £1.07), *Watchmen* dropped down the comic chart and *OutRun* was June's most popular arcade game.



COMMODORE USER



A two-page preview of US Gold's conversion of the Atari arcade game *Road Runner*, which also put paid to Software Projects' plans for a licensed game of the cartoon, received a favourable albeit tentative thumbs up. Although faithful to the arcade game it was a mediocre offering.



CHARTS

JUNE 1987

MUSIC



1. I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Whitney Houston)
2. Hold Me Now (Johnny Logan)
3. Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now (Starship)
4. I Want Your Sex (George Michael)
5. Star Trekkin' (The Firm)

SPECTRUM



1. Feud (Bulldog)
2. Nemesis (Konami)
3. BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Paperboy (Elite)
5. Olli And Lissa (Firebird)

COMMODORE 64



1. Park Patrol (Firebird)
2. BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Six Pak (Hit Pak)
4. Leaderboard Executive (US Gold)
5. Gauntlet: The Deeper Dungeons (US Gold)

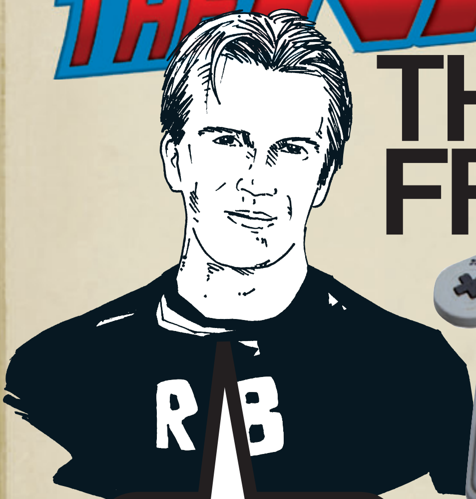
AMSTRAD

1. BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Six Pak (Hit Pak)
3. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Feud (Bulldog)
5. Big Four (Durell)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1992



FEBRUARY 1992 – April SNES Day, Sega wonders, 16-bit Seymour, Space Gun shoots, Sim Ant colonises, Space Ace II induces sleep, Knightmare doesn't, and the Empire Develops Back. Richard Burton cuddles up with some Taun Taun innards…



» It's almost here… no really, it is, Nintendo said so… April wasn't it? April. Definitely April…

Nintendo finally confirmed the official UK release of the Super Famicom after months of procrastination. The Super NES, as it was known over here, would eventually arrive early April and come with the marvellous Super Mario World cartridge. The tentative launch price was set at £149.

With Sega recently unleashing its Mega CD add-on onto the Genesis/Mega Drive-owning public, the news that it had decided to release a new machine, in collaboration with JVC, called the Wondermega was met by puzzlement particularly when everyone found out what it actually was. Essentially it was exactly the same as the Mega CD, except the Wondermega combined the two component parts into one casing resulting in a more compact machine. Although the console was only available in Japan it sold reasonably well at its £200 equivalent price tag. A Mark II version followed with some cosmetic case differences and a wireless controller option, but was otherwise exactly the same as the Mark I. Both naturally had a karaoke option.

Amiga and Atari ST owners had been sampling the delights of *Dizzy* over the previous few months, but now those Codemasters people wanted to inflict another cutesy character on the 16-bit micros, Seymour in *Super Seymour Saves The World*.

Although the Seymour games were essential budget gaming on Spectrum and Commodore 64, the Amiga/ST offering missed the mark by a country mile. *Super Seymour* was fundamentally a thinly disguised *Bomb Jack* clone with the merest whiff of an eco-friendly related theme. Like the toxic waste Seymour was collecting, the game should have been encased in concrete and thrown in the sea.

Elsewhere, Ocean Software announced that its latest coin-op conversion was complete. The under-rated shooter *Space Gun*, the illegitimate offspring of *Operation Wolf* and *Doom* (should the two have got together), turned out to be very playable on every format it was released on, including the Sega Master System and Spectrum.

Ocean also circulated a press release regarding a new title it was planning for the summer… and it was certainly a peculiar one. In conjunction with Maxis, who created such gems as *Sim City* and *Sim Earth*, was the slightly oddball offering of *Sim Ant*, an ant colony simulation.

While sounding utterly dull and bereft of gameplay – where are the bazookas and power ups? – it was surprisingly engaging for a game that threatened to be almost educational. *Sim Ant* was eventually found colonising the Amiga and PC in the summer.

Due out in early-February was *Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge* by the Bluth Studios and released by Empire. Available on Amiga, PC and ST, the premise of the game (and we use the word 'game' in the loosest sense) was that the said evildoer, Borf, had been reduced to a baby with his Infanto Ray at the end of the first *Space Ace* game. Thanks to his Goon minions, he's been returned to his loathsome adult-sized self, kidnapped your missus and done a runner…

Space Ace II turned out to be more an exercise by talented graphic artists then a game with any discernable playability. It was, to all intents and purposes, a cartoon. Yep, it oozed loveliness in the eye-candy department, but the rest was pure window dressing except for the £35 price tag. Ouch.

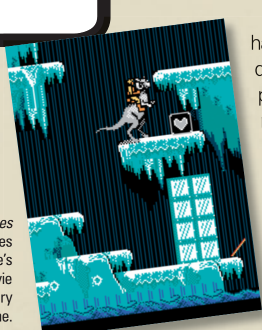
At the other end of the spectrum was *Knightmare*, a game based on the children's television series, released by Mindscape



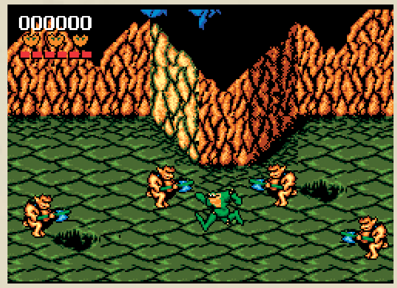
» [Atari ST] *Super Seymour Saves The Planet*: Reasonable but certainly not up to the usual Codemasters/*Dizzy* standard.



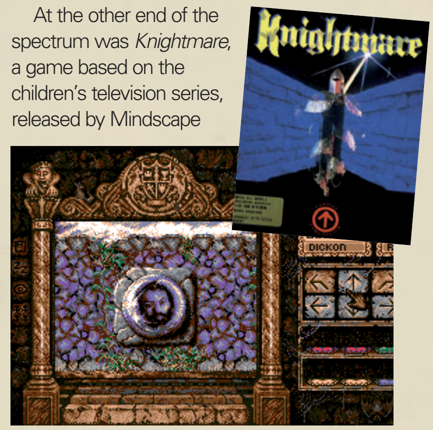
» [Amiga] *Space Gun*: If shooting the faces off aliens is your cup of tea, well, you're in luck…



» [NES] *The Empire Strikes Back*: Lucasfilm Games took the beardy one's best *Star Wars* movie and turned it into a very acceptable game.



» [Amiga] *Battle Toads*: Oh dear, oh dear. Miserable graphics were the best point of this game. Complete toss.



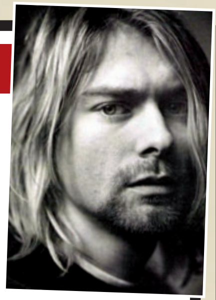
» [Amiga] *Knightmare*: Tony Crowther's conversion of the TV series was excellent and captured the feel of the show very well.

1992

FEBRUARY NEWS

The English Premier League was formed on 20 February, marking the beginning of Man U's astonishing run of success in it. The league was formed when the old First Division of the Football League decided to break away from the remaining divisions to pursue lucrative TV deals, with BSkyB assigned the broadcasting rights.

The Winter Olympic Games, held in Albertville, France, took place between 8 and 23 February. This was the last time the Winter Games were held in the same year as the Summer Olympics. The International Olympic Committee decided to hold each Olympiad alternately every two years. In 1992, Team GB did us proud by winning no medals whatsoever.



» Cobain: grunge legend and wearer of PJs.

On 24 February, Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love were married on Waikiki Beach, Hawaii. The bride looked fetching in a satin gown while the groom wore his pyjamas.

Also on 24 February, 1.2 million Americans voted to choose which Elvis likeness – the Fifties fresh-faced rocker or the 1973 jumpsuited version – should appear on US postage stamps. The public decided Elvis should be remembered as he was in the Fifties. Uh huh uh.



» Any thoughts on what the back of an Elvis stamp would taste like? Cheeseburgers presumably.



» [Mega Drive] *Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf*: Save people, shoot things and, thankfully, blow a lot of stuff up.



» [Amiga] *Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge*: The *Dragon's Lair* creator makes a thing of beauty. Pity there's not much to the gameplay.



and written by Tony Crowther. In the same vein as the TV show, you found yourself in a *Dungeons & Dragons*-style scenario having to solve puzzles and riddles to progress through the storyline. It proved to be every bit as good as the show, although only Amiga and ST owners got to be a *Knightmare* dungeoneer.

Riding high on the splendid reception its *Star Wars* NES game had received, Lucasfilm decided that the timing was right to announce the next instalment of the NES trilogy with development beginning on *The Empire Strikes Back*. Although not Womp Rat-blastingly brilliant, it still managed to cover most bases in terms of playability and faithfulness to the movie, allowing you to visit Hoth, Dagobah and the Cloud City, among others. Later in the year a NES version of *Return Of The Jedi* was also under development, but never saw release.

Having recently enjoyed positive reviews for their *Battle Toads* game on the NES, Rare and Tradewest decided to offer a licensing deal for an Amiga version of the popular game, and up stepped Mindscape, a company keen to deliver a quality conversion to the Amiga-gaming fraternity. What they actually produced was a God-awful videogame with no redeeming features at all. Rare never converted anything to the Amiga again…

The Computer & Video Games staff were equally happy bunnies giving out C&VG Hit status to *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* (Lucasfilm/US Gold, PC), *John Madden Football* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), *Gradius* (Konami, PC-Engine), *James Pond II: Codename Robocod* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *Speedball II* (Mirrorsoft, Mega Drive), *Star Wars* (Lucasfilm, NES) and *Fighting Masters* (Treco, Mega Drive),

Their sister magazine, *Mean Machines*, only managed to bestow two Mega Game awards this month. The two lonely but perfectly formed recipients were *Desert Strike II: Return To The Gulf* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive) and the magnificent *Super Mario World* (Super Famicom).

Receiving a friendly smile and a firm congratulatory handshake from *Zero's* reviewing department were *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* (Lucasfilm/US Gold, PC), *Knightmare* (Mindscape, Amiga), *Falcon 3.0* (Mirrorsoft, PC), *The Legend Of Darkmoon* (US Gold, Amiga/PC), *Tip Off* (Anco, Amiga), *John Madden Football* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), and *Heart Of China* (Dynamix, Amiga), all of which were rewarded with Zero Hero status.

THIS MONTH IN... CHARTS



COMMODORE FORMAT

In the regular developer diary feature with John and Steve Rowlands, the people behind *Creatures II*, the highlight was the three days at the Commodore Show at Earls Court where the boys spent much of their time boozing and riding on a waltzer located on Ocean Software's stand.





COMMODORE POWER

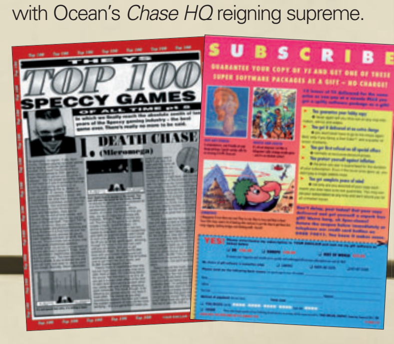
Issue two of *CP* featured *GamesMaster*, the new videogame TV show for Channel 4. Among the mini interviews was one with presenter Dominik Diamond. When pressed about his favourite part of filming, he replied: "Giving the Golden Joystick to Annabel Croft."





YOUR SINCLAIR

The final segment of the Best 100 Speccy Games Of All Time ended with the revelation that *Death Chase* by Micromega was the pinnacle of Spectrum gaming. 18 months later, *YS* readers had the chance to vote for their own best 100 games with Ocean's *Chase HQ* reigning supreme.



FEBRUARY 1992



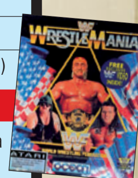
AMIGA

1. WWF WrestleMania (Ocean)
2. The Simpsons (Ocean)
3. James Pond II: Codename Robocod (Millennium)
4. Heimdall (Core)
5. Lotus Turbo Challenge 2 (Gremlin)



ATARI LYNX

1. S.T.U.N Runner (Atari)
2. Robotron 2084 (Shadowsoft)
3. Hard Drivin' (Atari)
4. Viking Child (Atari)
5. Scrapyard Dog (Atari)



ATARI ST

1. WWF WrestleMania (Ocean)
2. The Simpsons (Ocean)
3. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
4. Lotus Turbo Challenge 2 (Gremlin)
5. Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker (Virgin)

MUSIC

1. Stay (Shakespears Sister)
2. Goodnight Girl (Wet Wet Wet)
3. I'm Doing Fine Now (Pasadenas)
4. Twilight Zone (2 Unlimited)
5. I Wonder Why (Curtis Stigers)



15

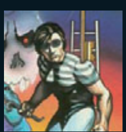
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

BONGO

THE ORIGINAL C16 LOVE RAT



» **PUBLISHER:** ANIROG SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** C16
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

Udo Gertz released five games on the C16, all of them head and shoulders above most of the competition. His game design was great, his visuals superb, music top notch, and, maybe most importantly, he was one of the few programmers who managed to master sprite manipulation on Commodore 16.

Bongo, contains possibly the largest and most well-animated sprites to ever appear on the machine. Bongo the rat looks lovely… as far as rats go, of course. The game is a single-screen platformer and your aim is simple: rescue the fair maiden found on each screen. Another notable aspect of *Bongo* is the in-game music, which is simply wonderful. Play the game for yourself and see if you can resist going down the slides just to hear the accompanying ditty.

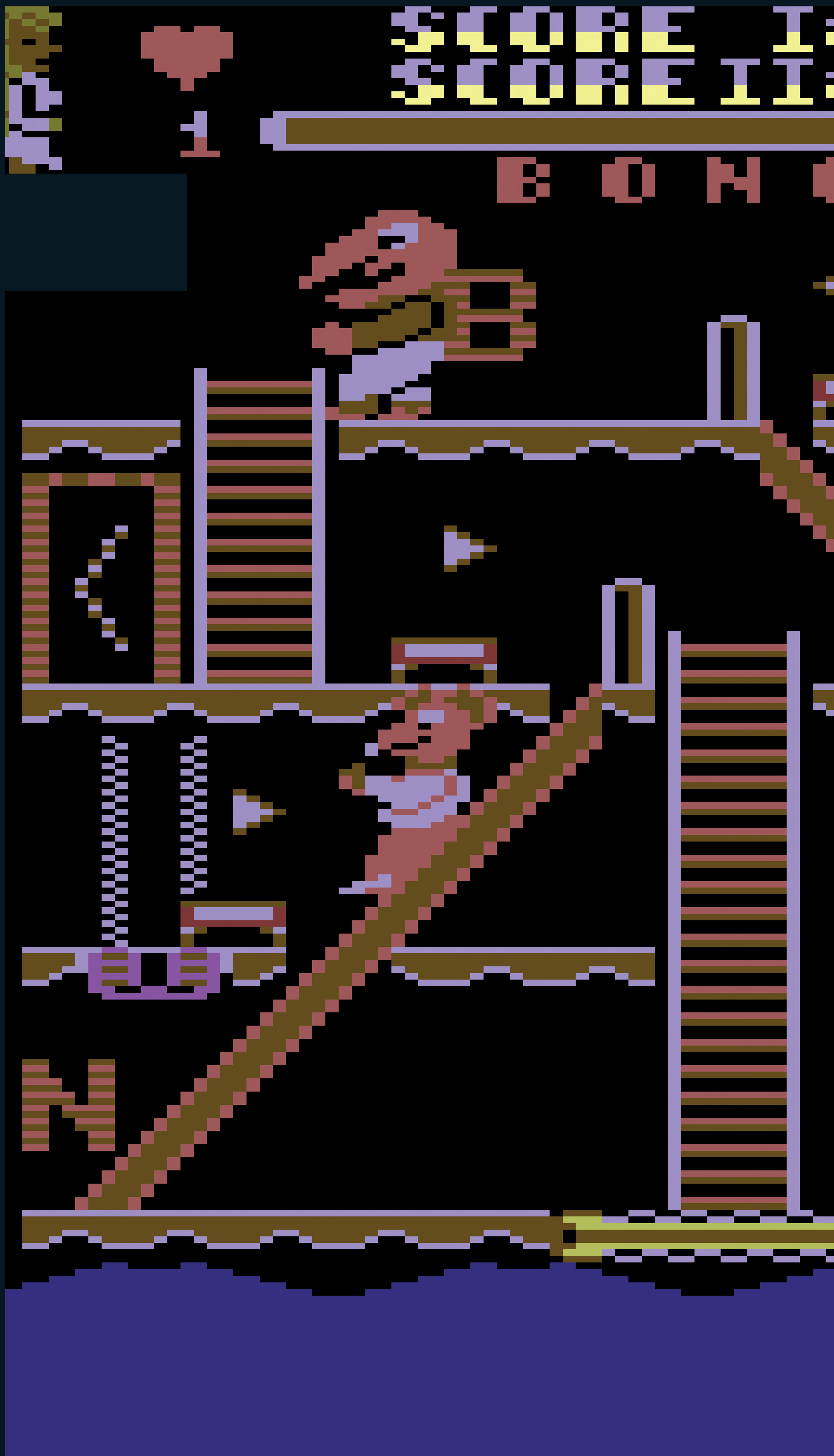
Time here should be taken to mention the cassette inlay artwork, which features a rather nicely attired distressed damsel (in a dress). At the age of 11, she rocked my world.

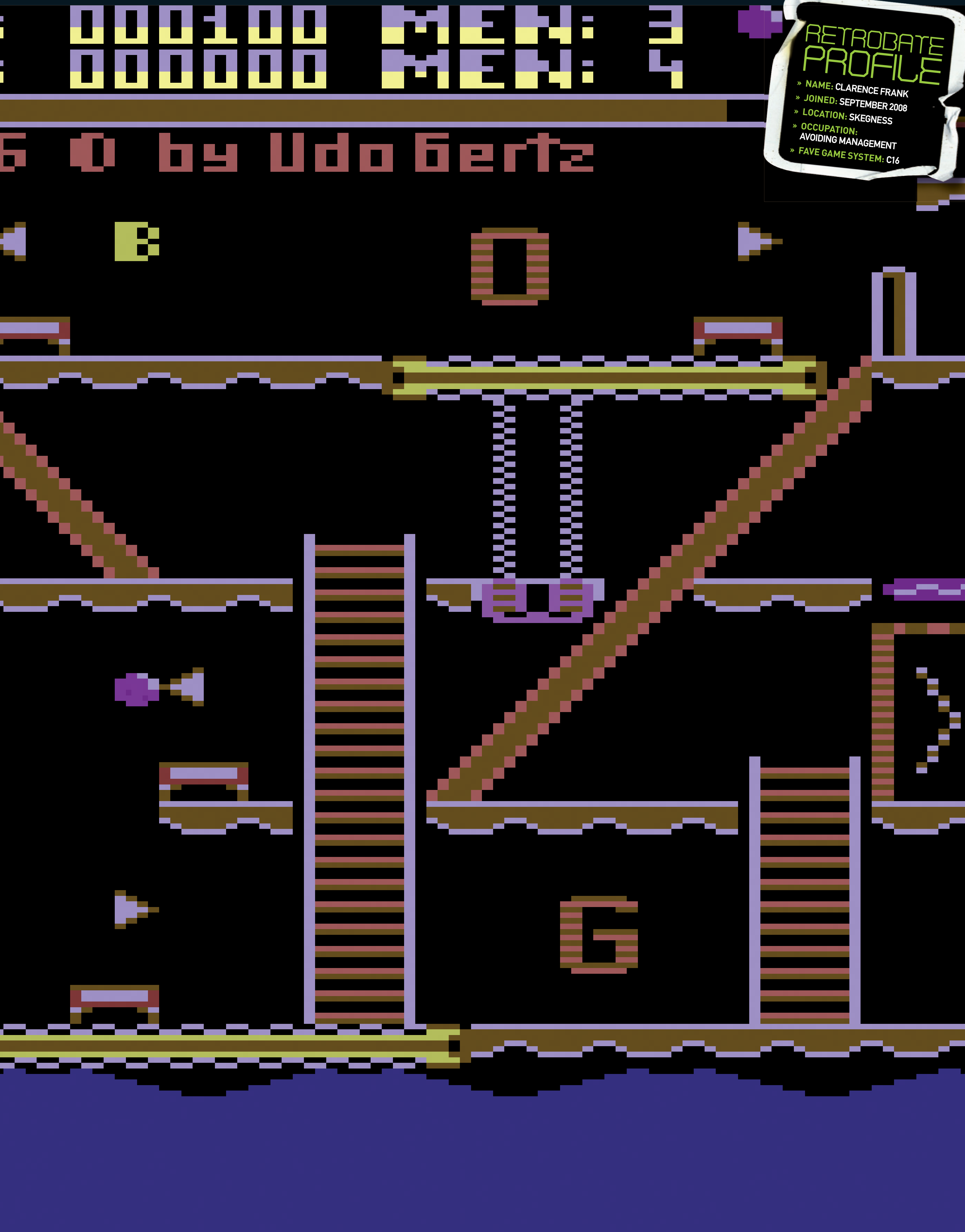
Anyway, to save Bongo's lovely lady friend, our ratty hero must skitter around the screen, making use of slides, ladders, lifts and trampolines, and collect five gems on each screen. Why this would free our rodent's girl is not entirely clear, but it does. It is not advisable to question the ways of rats. This I have learned.

Bongo's quest is of course made more difficult by the ubiquitous baddies that patrol the levels of each screen, but Bongo has a trick up his ratty little sleeve – he can teleport around by standing over one of five large letters dotted around the screen that spell out his name.

Bongo looks simple enough to start with (it only has six levels), but the game includes a level designer, so there is the potential to create unlimited saved sets of levels on tape – a pretty remarkable feature in itself. This, linked with the overall quality of the game, makes it a real must have.

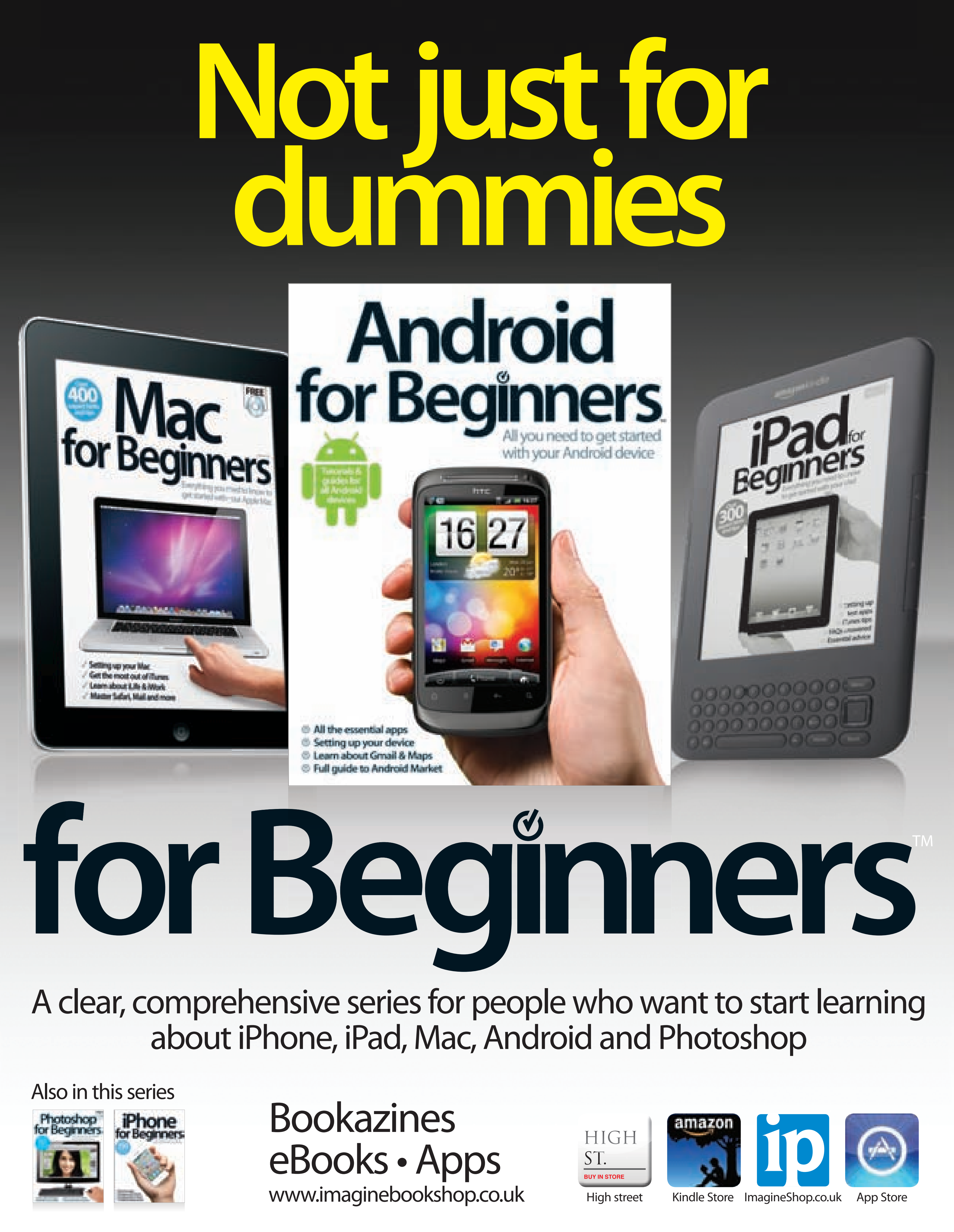
Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

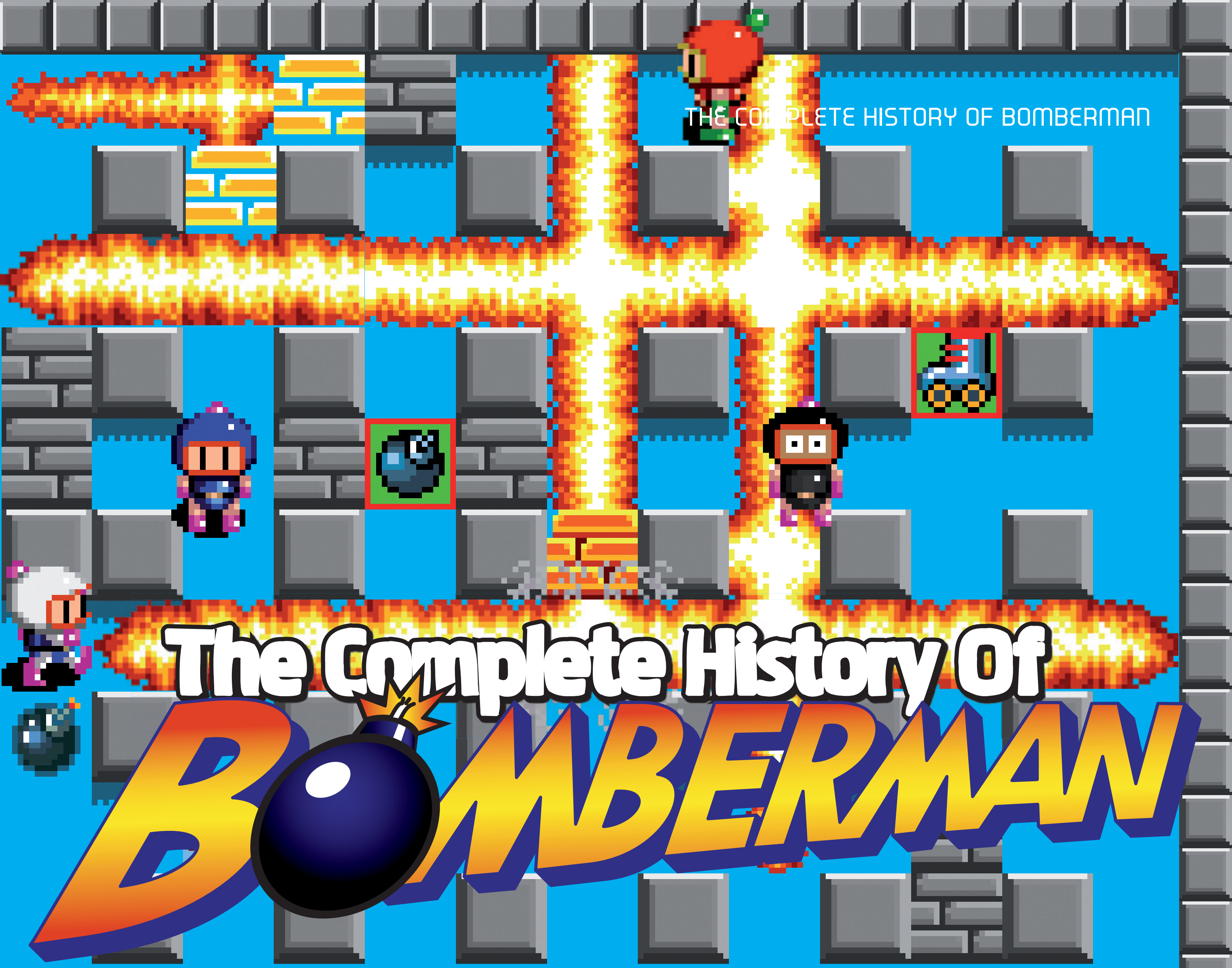




RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** CLARENCE FRANK
» **JOINED:** SEPTEMBER 2008
» **LOCATION:** SKEGNESS
» **OCCUPATION:** AVOIDING MANAGEMENT
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** C16


Not just for dummies
Android for Beginners
All you need to get started with your Android device
Tutorials & guides for all Android devices
All the essential apps
Setting up your device
Learn about Gmail & Maps
Full guide to Android Market
Mac for Beginners
Setting up your Mac
Get the most out of iTunes
Learn about iLife & iWork
Master Safari, Mail and more
iPad for Beginners
for Beginners™
A clear, comprehensive series for people who want to start learning about iPhone, iPad, Mac, Android and Photoshop
Also in this series
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The Complete History Of BOMBERMAN

Looking back, it's hard to believe Bomberman began life as a single-player game about killing balloons. The series is renowned for offering the very best in multiplayer gaming. That, and robots that resemble anthropomorphic TV sets and ride kangaroos like mountain bikes. Stuart Hunt speaks to Hudson to lift the lid on its seminal multiplayer classic

In over 60 games stretching across three generations, Bomberman's core gameplay has remained unchanged. While the series shook things up with robot men, kangaroos, bosses, power-ups and multiplayer, its to-and-fro gameplay, functional look, and waiting for the computer enemies to drop the ball to capitalise on their idiocy remains as iconic to the series as the bricks, bombs and mayhem.

Released in Japan in 1983, under the title *Bakudan-Otoko* (or *Bomb-Man*), the first iteration of *Bomberman* appeared on various Japanese home computers, including the MSX, Sharp X-1 and NEC's PC-88, before reaching our shores a year later under the quirkier title *Eric And The Floaters*. Oddly, while the name was altered because it was felt that a game with the word 'bomb' in its title could be too 'dangerous', the gameplay and appearance have remained unchanged. In terms of the evolution of the series, however, there are clear differences between that first game and subsequent *Bomberman* incarnations. *Bakudan-Otoko* was single-player only, and the game's mazes didn't feature power-ups (these weren't introduced until the PC-Engine and NES versions). Also, the protagonist was an adventurer tasked with escaping the evil Floaters, a band of deadly zombie creatures that resemble balloons.

When in their normal 'purple' state, the Floaters hover around the

Meet The Bombers

We take a closer look at villains that have appeared



Bagura

First introduced: Bomberman '94

Bagura is a recurring chief villain. He made his debut in *Bomberman '94*, where he tried to destroy Planet Bomber by colliding it with a comet-sized spaceship, Bagura looks like an old man, and he wears a golden monocle and red cape.



Brain Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 2

Brain Bomber is the current leader of the recurring Five Dastardly Bomber villains. Notably smaller than the other characters, Brain's arms and legs are usually concealed inside a purple cloak, giving him the appearance of a funnel cake.



Black Bomberman

First introduced: Bomberman (PC-Engine)

Black was the first new character Hudson introduced to the series when he played the role of final boss in the PC-Engine game. While early games continued to portray him as a villain and a rival to White Bomber, in later games the two became friends.



Jet Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 4

Jet Bomber is one of the Five Bomber Kings. One of the largest bosses in the series, owing to the rather large rocket-powered jetpack on his back, Jet is also one of the most powerful and is able to destroy Bomberman simply by colliding with him.



Magnet Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 2

While little is known about Magnet Bomber, his power comes from his Magneto-like magnetism and his ability to make bombs stick to Bomberman. He is one of the weaker bosses and is usually the first of the Five Dastardly Bombers the player must face.

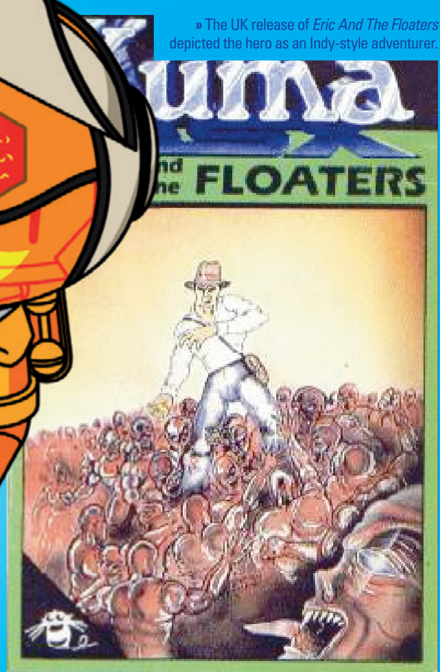


Plasma Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 2

Once the leader of the Five Dastardly Bombers, Plasma's power comes from electricity and plasma. In the finale of *SB2* he offers his hand to Bomberman as a gesture of peace, before getting shot. He returns to the series but remains a villain.





» The UK release of *Eric And The Floaters* depicted the hero as an Indy-style adventurer.

maze and pose little threat to Eric. However, they will momentarily flash red and in this state become far more aggressive and will home in on Eric. Moreover, if a player mistakenly blows up the exit door with a badly placed bomb, the game penalises them by throwing even more of the enemies into the maze, creating all sorts of nightmares for the player.

Hudson told us that the principal design of *Bakudan-Otoko* should be credited to Hudson programmer Mr Y Tanaka. Sadly, as Tanaka no longer works for Hudson, we were unable to ask him about the inspiration behind the game, and our contact, while happy to answer all of our questions, was uncertain of its origins. In terms of gameplay, it's likely *Bakudan-Otoko* was inspired by two arcade classics: the granddaddy of maze games *Pac-Man* and Universal's *Mr Do!*. Sharing more similarities with the latter, *Bakudan-Otoko* enabled the player to deform the maze, offering a strategic advantage over their enemies, and complete levels in one of two ways: Eric (or Bomber Man) could either clear the screen of enemies, or avoid confrontation with the titular Floaters by locating the level's exit hidden behind one of the bricks on the stage.



Eric And The Floaters garnered average review scores in its day, with many magazines criticising its limited gameplay and clunky keyboard controls. While the game could be played easily enough with a joystick, keyboard movement was assigned to the W, D, X, and A keys and making the shape of an eschewed D-pad. And as the controls couldn't be redefined, it made steering Eric in moments of



some choice Bomberman in the series over the years…



Golem Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 2

Also known as Fire Bomber, Golem is one of the strongest enemies. A Dastardly Bomber, he differs from his peers in that his eyes are concealed by a visor and he doesn't wear anything around his neck. He is often portrayed as naive.



Hammer Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 4

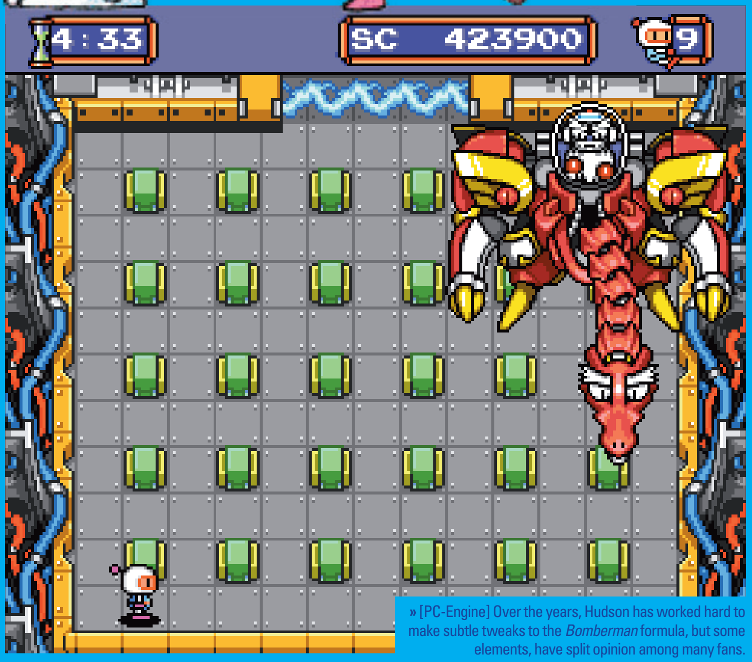
Another of the Bomber Kings, Hammer's appearance resembles that of a green knight. He has one eye and swings his archaic weapon, a Morning Star, around his head to smash away the items that Bomberman is carrying.



Pretty Bomber

First introduced: Super Bomberman 2

Pretty Bomber (aka Ms Flashy) is the only female Dastardly Bomber. She started out as a villain but later reformed and befriended Bomberman. She is one of the only bosses to be playable over the course of the series (see *Super Bomberman 3*).



» [PC-Engine] Over the years, Hudson has worked hard to make subtle tweaks to the *Bomberman* formula, but some elements, have split opinion among many fans.



» [Xbox 360] Whatever the future holds for *Bomberman*, it'll have nothing to do with *Act:Zero*

complete panic without a joystick almost impossible. Nevertheless, the game did well enough for Hudson to consider releasing a sequel. *Bomberman 3D* was an ambitious three-dimensional *Monster Maze* approach to the original top-down gameplay. It was only released for the MSX format, and we suspect it wasn't the hit Hudson hoped it would be as the series reverted back to the original top-down perspective for its next release.

It was really the early Famicom/NES reworking of *Bakudan-Otoko* where the *Bomberman* we know today really started to take shape. The NES port marks the first appearance of the iconic robot characters in the series, and it's actually Nintendo who can be thanked for the redesign. In its fledgling years, Hudson had a very strong relationship with Nintendo, and without going into too much detail – as the a concluding part of our summation of Hudson's history is featured on page 44 – Hudson was a staunch supporter of the Nintendo Famicom, becoming the very first third-party developer to pledge support for the gazillion-selling 8-bit console. Hudson was aware that the console provided a great launching pad for videogame characters, as proved by Link, Mario and Donkey Kong. With this in mind, Hudson felt *Bomberman*'s current hero was too generic next to his more colourful 8-bit peers, and so decided that a new and more memorable character needed to step into his shoes.

> **"The Bomberman we know and love today began with the Famicom version"**

Before work started porting *Bakudan-Otoko* across to Famicom, Hudson had previously worked on converting Douglas E Smith's classic *Lode Runner* to the machine. To bring its conversion bang up to date with the aesthetics of other games appearing on the console, Shinichi Nakamoto, head of development at Hudson at the time and principal designer of the PC-Engine console, set about adding new enemy designs to the game to make it more appealing to the younger Famicom audience. One of Hudson's creations was a nondescript green-and-white droid, and when porting *Bakudan-Otoko* over to the Famicom, Hudson saw potential in the character and replaced him with the game's original hat-wearing adventurer. Interestingly, it's clear that even during the development of the *Lode Runner* port Hudson had bigger plans for the robot character, because when you complete the NES port of *Lode Runner* the message 'Congratulations. Bomberman becomes Runner. See you again in *Lode Runner*' appears.

So the *Bomberman* series we know and love today began with the Nintendo Famicom version. It set the aesthetic tone for the series. In fact, such was its success, the game was later ported back to MSX in the form of *Bomberman Special* in 1986. But with a new hero and colourful new look there was still one vital ingredient missing, one aspect to really bolster *Bomberman*'s status and appeal as a videogame classic.

The Complete History Of Bomberman



» [SNES] The *Super Bomberman* series was a real high point for the series, featuring some of the best multiplayer games on SNES.



It wasn't until PC-Engine *Bomberman* that the series received the frantic and addictive multiplayer mode with which it is now synonymous – ironic when you consider that the PC-Engine only had one joypad port. Before *Bomberman's* 1990 debut on PC-Engine, 'multiplayer gaming' usually involved two friends taking it in turns to play videogames by passing the controller between one another like a bizarre couch-potato relay race. The PC-Engine version of *Bomberman*, as well as introducing co-op and a link-up mode via two PC-Engine GT handhelds, also allowed five players to battle each other in a Battle mode via a multitap produced by Hudson. So while *Bomberman* is widely praised for introducing modern gaming to the concept of 'party' games, it can also be thanked for coming up with the concept of localised team deathmatches as well. So why did Hudson change the game so drastically, and why so late to introduce multiplayer to the series?

"Back then, hardware specifications were improved," reveals Kazuhiko Nonaka, vice president of CC Production Division at Hudson. "As for PC-Engine, multi-tap [multiple socket outlets] allowed for up to five players to enjoy the game all together at precisely the same time. We came up with the idea of a battle mode for *Bomberman*. This changed the *Bomberman* game dramatically and successfully created the simultaneous multiplayer game. Players no longer had to wait for their friends to switch controllers."

Nonaka continues: "It was difficult to strike a balance between strong players and weaker ones in order to help all the players enjoy the game until the last moment. Basically, strong players do not need any help, but beginners do. Therefore, we added features such as greater variations in items and the character 'Revenge' [for battle losers to rejoin the game from the outfield] to allow players who lost in a battle to enjoy longer gameplay."

As well as adding a multiplayer element to the game, the PC-Engine version further refined the look of the series. It was also the first game to really attempt to expand on the *Bomberman* universe, marking the first appearance of recurring hero White Bomber (or Shirobon, as he is known in Japan) as well as additional characters such as White Bomber's arch nemesis Black Bomber, who played the final boss in the game. With all these tweaks and elements gradually being added to the series, and the popularity of the NES conversion still piquant, it was obvious the PC-Engine version of *Bomberman* was destined for success, and Hudson knew it.

"The reaction from the Japanese press and public after the release was very good," continues Nonaka. "The original battle game was quite simple without any kick items by comparison with the current version, but the developers were so absorbed

> "We were very confident that the game would become a hit"



» [SNES] While the *Bomberman* games often lack the excitement of other classic single-player titles, in terms of multiplayer it's unsurpassed.



» [Neo-Geo] *Bomberman* has been released on practically every machine in the world, even finding its way to Neo-Geo courtesy of *Neo Bomberman*.



» [PC-Engine] The PC-Engine version of *Bomberman '93* is available on Wii through Virtual Console.



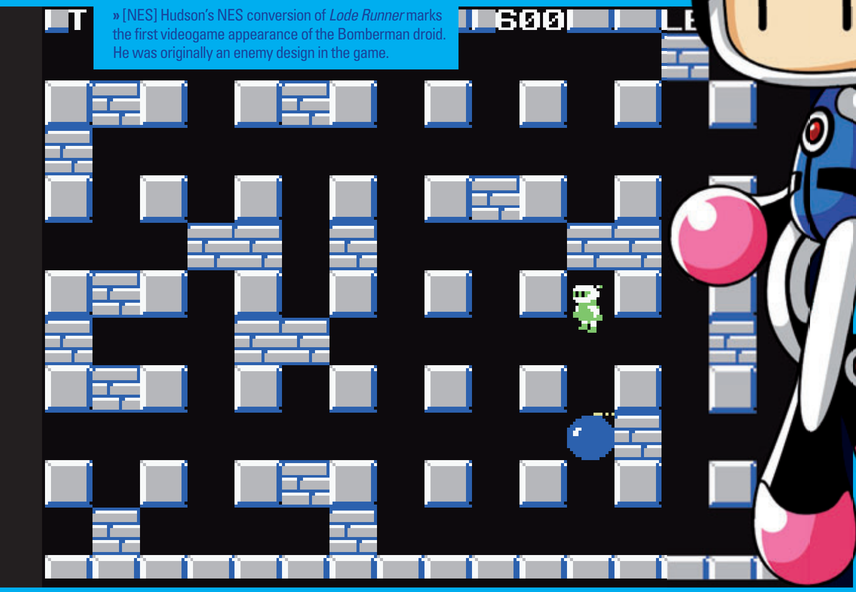
» [PC-Engine] C'mon, no self-respecting cheery looking videogame series would be without an annoying ice stage.

playing the battle game that they forgot everything else. In short, it affected their operations. Therefore, we were very confident that the game would become a hit, and were not surprised with the good reaction as we expected it."

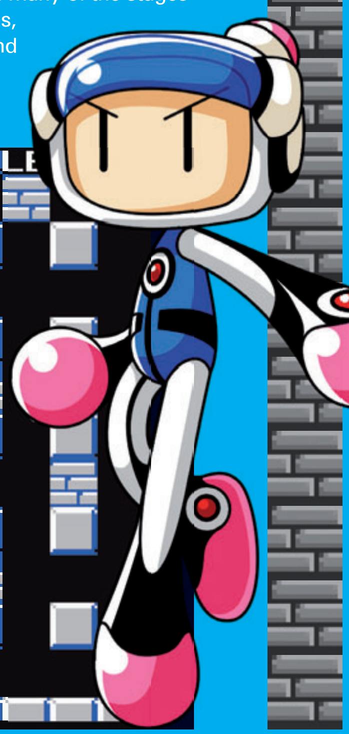
With the winning formula now in place, Hudson continued to tweak and refine *Bomberman* over the coming years. In total there have been 66 *Bomberman* titles released on various machines, not including genre spin-offs such as *Mario Kart*-alike *Bomberman Fantasy Racing* and the excellent *Puyo-Puyo*-style puzzler *Puzzle Bomber*. To cover them all in this feature and do them all justice would be impossible, so for this reason we've decided to only look back at the seminal games in the franchise, including the horrific *Bomberman Act:Zero,* which fell wildly short of the mark – we even managed to get Hudson's thoughts on that particular dud.

Given the success of the *Bomberman* games in Japan, it wasn't long before Hudson began working on a sequel. And in 1991 *Bomberman II* was released on Famicom/NES, marking the first multiplayer *Bomberman* game to appear on a Nintendo console. Retaining the same single-player gameplay as before, Hudson knew it was on to a winner with the multiplayer aspect introduced in the PC-Engine version of the game, and so added a two-player versus mode and, with the help of a NES Four Score multiplayer adaptor, a three-player battle mode to the single-player story mode. *Bomberman II* also saw the Black Bomber return as antagonist. This time White Bomber is framed for crimes committed by his rival and is thrown in the clink as a result. The premise of the game finds White trying to escape prison by battling through 48 block-filled mazes. The game was originally exclusive to the Famicom/NES, but was later re-released for Game Boy in 2005.

All the *Bomberman* games that appeared on PC-Engine were excellent, but *Bomberman '93* is notable for a number of reasons. First, Hudson put more thought into level design, with many of the stages featuring switches, conveyor belts and even teleport devices. It was



» [NES] Hudson's NES conversion of *Lode Runner* marks the first videogame appearance of the Bomberman droid. He was originally an enemy design in the game.



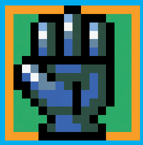
Whassup?

Power-Ups play an integral part in Bomberman's gameplay. Here's a rundown of the main ones and their abilities…



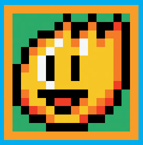
Bomb-up

The Bomb panel increases the player's bomb-dropping abilities by one bomb when it's picked up. This helps increase the pace of play, and allows players to clear paths quicker by 'chain bombing' (ie dropping them in close proximity to one another).



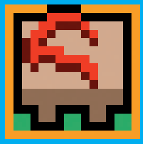
Power Glove

The Power Glove gives the player the ability to pick up, carry and lob bombs at their opponents. It's a great power-up for sneak kills, as it allows the player to throw bombs off one side of the screen and see them land on the opposite side.



Fire

The Fire panel increases the potency – or rather the reach – of your bombs by one tile. This is especially handy for games played out in grid-style maps. This power-up can backfire as players can forget the reach of their bombs and get caught up in the blast.



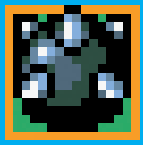
Geta

The Geta (or clog) panel is a 'trap' item in the game as picking it up decreases the player's speed, which, in some instances, can actually be a good thing. In some games the Geta panel can be picked up and thrown at opponents to momentarily stun them.



Kick

This power-up enables the player to kick a ticking bomb out of the way. It comes in handy when you're surrounded by bombs on all sides. A kicked bomb will bounce across the map and only stop when it makes contact with a solid wall, a bomb or a Bomberman.



Pierce Bomb

The Pierce Bomb allows a player's bomb radius to penetrate through soft walls. It is a great offensive power-up as it allows a player to clear walls quicker and prevent opponents from hiding behind destructible walls for cover.



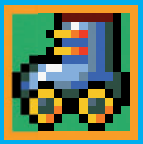
Power Bomb

One of the series' most powerful bomb-ups, this makes the first bomb the player lays ultra strong. The player can only drop one Power Bomb at a time; all subsequent bombs laid will be the regular type until all the player's bombs have been dropped/exploded.



Rubber Bomb

This Rubber Bomb is an unpredictable power-up that turns the player's bombs to rubber. When thrown, their sporadic nature causes them to bounce in any direction. They are great for stunning enemies.



Skate

The Skate panel is basically just the polar opposite of the Geta power-up, in that it increases a player's speed. Be warned, though, sometimes having a swift-footed Bomberman can make them harder to control and the game more difficult.



Skull

This 'trap' item hinders the player with one of a number of detrimental side effects: from decreasing the potency of a player's bombs to forcing them to drop all their bombs at once (ably coined 'bomb diarrhoea'), and slowing them down, making them an easy target.

The Complete History Of Bomberman



» [SNES] *Bomberman B-Daman* was a bizarre mash-up of two Hudson videogame franchises and saw Bomberman firing marbles from his belly.



» With over 66 games under the name, Bomberman remains one of Hudson's most successful creations.

also the first time Hudson permeated the traditional *Bomberman* action with sub boss fights and the first time that 'kick' panels were introduced, drastically changing the pace of the game. With the kick ability, players could now avoid 'bomb traps' by kicking away ticking bombs blocking their escape.

With Hudson working to release a new *Bomberman* game on a yearly basis, the pressure was on to add new elements and features to keep the game feeling fresh while not over complicating the formula. Released in 1993, *Bomberman '94* (released as *Mega Bomberman* on Mega Drive) marked the first *Bomberman* title to be released on a Sega console. It was also the first time Hudson introduced the modern design of White Bomber to the series – basically just a less paunchy version of the original sprite. *Bomberman '94* is also the first time in the series that fans were introduced to Louies, the Yoshi-like kangaroo helpers that Bomberman rides to give the players an extra hit. Louies – sometimes referred to as Rooeys – hatch from eggs that are scattered around the mazes, and each has a different ability depending on its colour. While they proved popular with many fans, some argued they were too advantageous, which is perhaps why Hudson hasn't featured them in recent *Bomberman* titles.



One of the questions we were keen to put to Hudson was whether there have been any unreleased *Bomberman* games during the course of the series? We knew of course that there had been, but we were hoping our obtuseness would gain us some juicy insight into the history of those games and why they never found a release. Instead, Nonaka politely tells us there were unreleased *Bomberman* games, but that their contents were not wasted as they were simply handed down to the sequels.

The reason we've touched on this subject at this point in the feature, is that it has been rumoured Hudson initially approached Factor 5 (of *Lair* and *Rogue Squadron*) to do the Mega Drive conversion of *Bomberman '94* (*Mega Bomberman*). Factor 5 allegedly got as far as releasing a tech demo that showed up to eight players playing the game using two Sega Team player adaptors. For reasons that remain unclear, however – and we suspect it may have had something to do with the console rivalry between PC-Engine and Mega Drive – Hudson decided not to go with the concept, and the conversion was handled elsewhere. Interestingly, the PC-Engine version supports five players whereas the Mega Drive port only supports four.

1993 proved a busy year for the franchise as it was around this time that Hudson unveiled another project that never found its way to market. *Hi-Ten Bomberman* was a ten-player game developed exclusively for the PC-FX system. It was shown as a tech demo during Hudson's 'Caravan' gaming event in 1993, but never materialised at retail. It's believed, the *Hi-Ten* project provided the

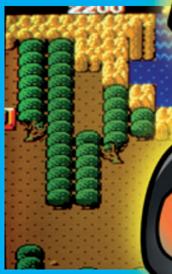


Not Da Bomb

Released on NES, *Bomber King* (also known as *Robowarrior* in the West), was intended to be a mature spin-off for the main *Bomberman* series. Given the simplicity of the source game, you'd think it would be pretty difficult for Hudson to mess up the *Bomberman* formula, but they did exactly that. *Bomber King* is obviously intended to be a more adult take on the puzzle classic, a notion supported by its darker visuals, a main character who resembles the characterless droids in *Act:Zero*, its freakish and random enemies and a difficulty level that is so unforgiving it's almost unbelievable. With practically identical gameplay to *Bomberman* – except for the fact that your character can now fire green balls at enemies – the main problem with *Bomber King* is that the player is forced to run away from their bombs as soon as they're dropped. Such is the length of their blast radius that if you don't follow this simple rule your character gets caught in the explosion every time. Obviously Hudson was trying to create a more frantic and tense gameplay experience, but all it actually succeeded in doing was creating one of the most painfully unfair experiences in the history of entertainment.









frame for *Saturn Bomberman*, which supported a ten-player mode.

1993 was also the year Hudson released the first game in its *Super Bomberman* series for SNES. *Super Bomberman* marks another high for the franchise and was the first four-player game for Nintendo's 16-bit console. A slight change in pace from previous console outings, *Super Bomberman's* mazes were single-screen only, with no scrolling, making for a classic *Bomberman* outing. It also featured two-player co-op, whereby two friends could work through the main story together. Battle mode was also tweaked: with a minute left on the clock, the game drops solid bricks around the edge of the maze, gradually shrinking the play area, and forcing players to edge closer to each other.

Owing to the game's popularity, Hudson released a total of five *Super Bomberman* titles on the Super Nintendo. *Super Bomberman 2* in 1994 saw the introduction of the Five Dastardly Bombers (a gang of recurring *Bomberman* villains, see Meet The Bombers boxout), a team battle mode in multiplayer, and new power-ups, such as hearts that respawn your character in battle, and remote-controlled bombs. Bizarrely, it's the only game in the *Super Bomberman* series without the two-player story mode. *Super Bomberman 3* (1995) was the first five-player videogame released for SNES, and a reworked version of



» [PC-Engine] *Bomberman '93* is really where Hudson started to rein in the addictive chaos for which the series is so admired.



» Over the years Hudson has added numerous characters to the series in a bid to keep the franchise feeling fresh.

"Many consider Saturn Bomberman to be the pinnacle of the franchise"

Bomberman '94, which may explain the simplified look of its graphics and the addition of the Louies from *Mega Bomberman* (also a reworking of *Bomberman '94*). It also introduced the 'Revenge' bomber mode, which enabled players who were out of the competition to throw bombs back into the fray from outside the arena, with the potential to rejoin the game if they could bomb one of the other players from the sidelines.

1996's *Super Bomberman 4* was the final *Bomberman* title released for SNES in the West, and introduced the Five Bomber Kings to the canon. A quintet similar to the Five Dastardly Bombers, the five kings were made playable in the game's battle mode. In 1997 *Super Bomberman 5* became the final *Super Bomberman* title to be released for the Super Nintendo and only found release in Japan. The only other *Bomberman* games released for Super Nintendo were *Panic Bomber World* (1995) and *Bomberman B-Daman* (1996). Created by a Korean Toy Manufacturer and featuring a cast of robots similar in appearance to Bomberman, the *B-Daman* licence was acquired by Hudson and adapted into a game about droids that solve puzzles by firing marbles from their chests. Just to confuse matters further, 1996 saw both licences come to together for a *B-Daman*-style game starring *Bomberman* characters.

As well as the *Super Bomberman* series, there is another *Bomberman* game that many fans consider to be the pinnacle of the franchise. *Saturn Bomberman* was the first to offer ten-player multiplayer, and also the first to feature internet support via the pre-paid pay-per-play system SEGASATURN NETWORKS in Japan, and through Netlink in the States. Sadly, Europeans dipped out of having any such 'online' battle feature in their version of the game. Released in 1996, *Saturn Bomberman* featured both the usual story and battle mode but added an all-new master mode, whereby the player is tasked with clearing a series of screens and then ranked on how fast they can achieve said task.

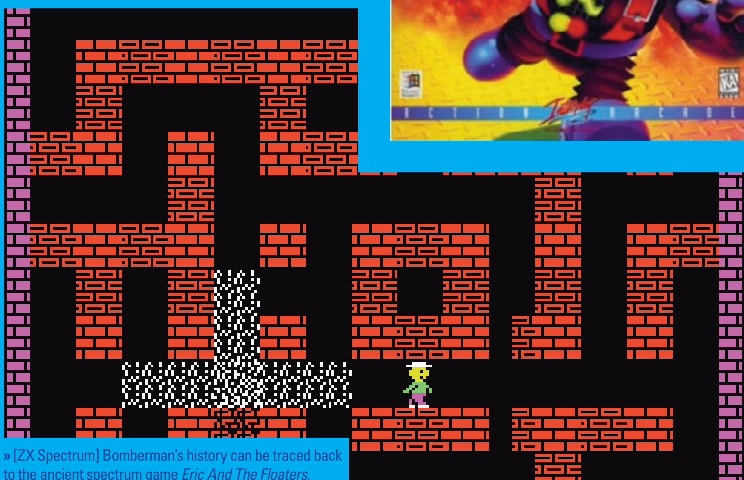


Saturn Bomberman also introduced dinosaurs to the series. Essentially just a variant of the Louie helpers, the dinosaurs differed in that collecting the power-ups to fill a meter at the top of the screen caused them to gain in size and for their powers to also increase.

The Complete History Of Bomberman






» [ZX Spectrum] Bomberman's history can be traced back to the ancient spectrum game *Eric And The Floaters.*


» [PC-Engine] The balloon-looking Floaters even made it across to the PC-Engine, despite the console being perfectly capable of producing far more detailed enemies.

"We are absolutely sure that Bomberman will become more powerful"



Retro Gamer would like to thank Kazuhiko Nonaka and Hiromi Tomisawa at Hudson for answering all of our questions and for helping us with our research.

Saturn Bomberman's battle mode also added a huge cast of characters taken from other Hudson videogame series, including the likes Milon, Bonk and Master Higgins.

The games that followed *Saturn Bomberman*, never really captured the magic of those early days. Developed by Interplay, 1996's *Atomic Bomberman* was the first *Bomberman* released exclusively for PC. It retained the traditional gameplay but featured pre-rendered 3D graphics instead of the traditional hand-drawn sprites. It also allowed players to construct their own stages using a level-editor function, and take them online where you could battle with up to ten people. The release of *Bomberman 64* finally saw the franchise go fully three dimensional, for an all-out action-adventure videogame similar to *Super Mario 64*, and it then appeared in a series of games based on the *Bomberman Jetters* anime series in Japan. Hudson also smashed the *Bomberman* multiplayer record by releasing *Versus Bomberman 24* in Japan, which allowed for an impressive 24 players to participate in an epic multiplayer skirmish via mobile phones.

Most videogame franchises have one game they probably wish they could just brush under the carpet and forget, and *Bomberman* is definitely no exception. Released on Xbox 360 in 2006, *Bomberman Act: Zero* was an embarrassing misstep for both Hudson and the series. A prequel to the original NES game, it was intended to be a more realistic take on the franchise but instead it replaced the popular *Bomberman* characters with soulless droids. Adding an alternative but clunky third-person battle mode to the traditional top-down perspective, in terms of offering that classic gameplay, it fell massively short of the mark and was poorly received by many fans. We wondered what Hudson thought about the game, and the criticisms it received.

"In order to challenge a new direction in *Bomberman*, we made a huge change to the contents including designs. We think in hindsight that *Bomberman Act:Zero* fell short of users' expectations as we couldn't fully enrich, refine or choose the right contents for this sequel," admits Nonaka. "When it came to the contents, we had new ideas, such as the FPB mode with camera and the life system, but on the other hand it did not achieve enough volume or quality in many aspects compared with other sequels. Item variations, attractive characters, unique enemy characters, tactics-filled stages, various proposals to enjoy the game fully, and the shorter loading time, system-wise, were not realised as expected, as pointed out by press and our users. In addition, our pricing strategy was not good enough."

With Bomberman just recently celebrating his 25th anniversary, we asked Hudson what the future holds for this enduring character. Ironically, we were teased with the subtlest of bombshells that hinted at how the internet might be further utilised in future iterations.

"Next year, we are absolutely sure that Bomberman will become more powerful with more sequels to come. The internet makes it possible for multiplayer online battle available whenever you like. Nonaka finishes: "It is the perfect era for the series and we will power-up *Bomberman* further as an exciting communication tool for users."

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

SUPER DRUNK



GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO CORPORATION
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



» [Arcade] As the tough end boss of *Bubble Symphony*, Hyper Drunk attacked with a variety of weapons.



» [Arcade] Defeat Super Drunk and he falls down, cries his eyes out and turns into your parents. Odd.

Sounding like a cheap cider from your local off-licence, despite the rather amusing moniker, Super Drunk is more infuriation than intoxication. After using the same trapping and bursting mechanic for 99 levels against endless numbers of Zen-Chans and Monstas, Super Drunk is a shocking change of pace at the final stretch, and at the very moment you need to hang on to that last credit.

Whether it's because of his inflated size that he adopts Link's green hood or has a chin like a cow's udder, he cannot be captured in a bubble like previous adversaries, not until you whittle down his health through copious amounts of electricity. By quickly grabbing a lightning potion from the uppermost platforms, you gain the ability to spit lightning bubbles, and so the slog begins.

Although the potion bestows faster speed to Bub and Bob, that doesn't make his onslaught easier to avoid. As he rampages his way around the stage, sending lightning bolts from the opposite wall becomes the safest method, although his yobbish behaviour of chucking bottles is tough to avoid due to their wide radius. Whether through reaction or luck, dodging them makes you breathe a sigh of relief, before hurriedly starting on the next wave of lighting bolts until he rears back again.

Different conversions had their own variations on the fight. In the arcade game, for instance, you could create a column of bubbles all the way up the wall, where a chain reaction would pop the lot and guarantee a sure-fire hit. However, the NES version could only handle half-a-dozen bubbles on screen, so waiting until he was at your level – the optimum bottle-hitting range – was the only way to go. But the easiest was the Amiga version, where Super Drunk didn't throw a single bottle, effectively making him a glorified ping-pong ball.

When you finally capture him in a pocket of air and are moments away from rescuing the beloved Patty and Betty, you can scupper the happy ending by not letting the second player burst him. Even if you let Bob take the glory, it wasn't the true ending, which comes after beating him again in Super Bubble Bobble mode. When defeated, he transforms into a Giant Bubblun, cries for a bit, then turns into mama and papa. Finally. We learn two things here: your parents are alcoholics, and getting drunk with friends leads to happier endings.

Becoming parental didn't stop Super Drunk terrorising the various series sequels; he became the opening boss in *Bubble Symphony*, but thanks to a smaller screen presence and a comical charge move that's easy to dodge, he was a walkover. In *Parasol Stars*, he headlined the *Bubble Bobble* world – made less threatening due to a bottle-proof brolly – as well as making appearances in most *Bust-A-Move* games, as a puzzle fixture or arcade opponent.

While he became easier to vanquish in every subsequent cameo, it's clear that he's as much a fixture in the series as the dragons themselves, and one that will be ingrained in the memories of so many exhausted players who thought every enemy could be taken out with the use of a simple bubble. And as he returns in the WiiWare and Live Arcade remakes, a new generation will soon undergo that same sense of drunken panic.

"HE WILL BE INGRAINED IN THE MEMORIES OF MANY EXHAUSTED PLAYERS WHO THOUGHT EVERY ENEMY COULD BE TAKEN OUT WITH THE USE OF A SIMPLE BUBBLE"



» [Arcade] A comical sound-effect and steam that came from his ears made Super Drunk's angry charges easy to predict.



» [Arcade] The translated message tells you to use a friend to defeat Super Drunk in order to become human again.



» [SNES] In the final stage of *Puzzle Bobble*, you need to quickly clear the respawning bubbles and hit his protective shield.

ファイナル フロンティア

Finaru Furantier

Shrouded in a complex language and ocean of hentai, Japan's retro computer games have been overlooked by the West. John Szczepaniak digs deep and explores this final frontier

There is nothing new in retro games any more. There is nothing left to discover. Well, maybe there are a few things, as Stuart Campbell proved with his Tetris article in issue 64. But thanks to the internet, nearly any game of any age can be downloaded and emulated, almost every piece of information documented…

Except perhaps the world of Japanese home computers, arguably the last uncharted frontier for English-speaking retro enthusiasts. During the Eighties and Nineties, while the rest of the world went with Apple, Atari, Commodore and IBM for its computers, Japan isolated itself and adopted non-compatible, domestically produced ranges. This was partly due to difficulties with converting Western computers to handle the Japanese language, and it resulted in an evolutionary bubble with some amazing hardware and games, very few of which left Japan.

Ignoring systems that saw a Western release, such as the MSX (covered in issue 60), conservative estimates put the number of officially released Japanese computer games at well beyond five thousand. If you want to play them, however, you'll have to work at it as they're not easy to find. And those you do find are hidden under incomprehensible text and alongside 'eroge' (erotic games, or hentai).

Searching the internet with Romanised titles often turns up nothing, while using the original kanji names will only bring up Japanese websites, which Babelfish renders gibberish. Even downloading complete file archives, which are always missing titles due to a lack of definitive listings, will often present you with folders in kanji and kana (assuming your computer can even display them), making finding a good game a case of trial and error.

But nothing compares to discovering that Holy Grail: hearing music and seeing sights few others have, and clicking in that Saturn USB pad for some of the best gaming of your life.

A FORGOTTEN ERA

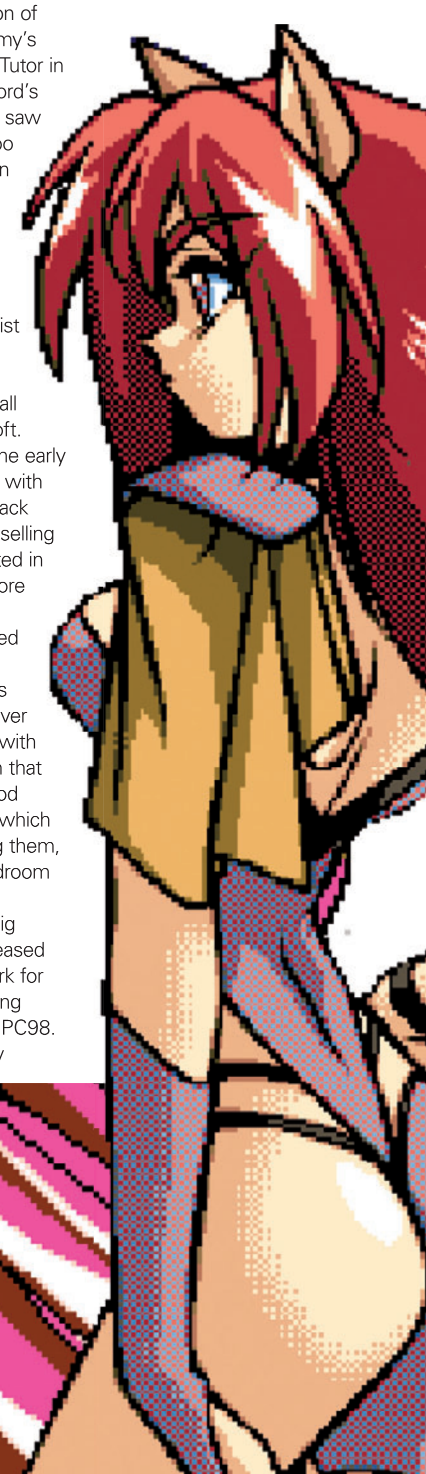
We're focusing on three hardware manufacturers in terms of personal computers that saw interesting games: NEC, Sharp and Fujitsu. Each developed their own unique and non-compatible range of 8-bit micros and then more powerful follow-ups. Like the diversity found with IBM and Macintosh computers, counting the variants is pointless after they top 50 different models.

Along with these three manufacturers was the MSX standard and its seemingly infinite variations, including models by primarily mainframe developers Hitachi and Toshiba, and a strange selection of failures from the early-Eighties: Tomy's Pyuta range (or Tomy/Grandstand Tutor in the West), Casio's PV2000, and Sord's M5 computer range (one of which saw a European release). Plus others too poorly documented – even in Japan – to mention.

Japan's 18-year-long computer bubble is difficult to summarise due to poor documentation, excessive hardware variations, and an abundance of doujinsoft (hobbyist games). Videogame publishing in particular between 1979 and 1985 was chaotic, and some argue that all games prior to 1985 were doujinsoft.

Many publishing companies in the early days were simply computer shops with guys programming games in the back – often just as a hobby – and then selling them out front. Nihon Falcom started in 1981 selling Apple computers, before shifting focus to developing and publishing games, while Koei started as a single guy, Kou Shibusawa (aka Yoichi Erikawa), mailing out his home-programmed tapes to whoever ordered them. Japan had parallels with England's early computer scene, in that if you could program and had a good idea you could find success. Enix, which always had a good nose for finding them, held a contest enticing hopeful bedroom coders. So did ASCII.

The mid-Eighties saw the first big shift. Game Arts' *Thexder* was released in 1985 and became the benchmark for commercial quality, and the following year brought a big upgrade for the PC98. Subsequent years saw increasingly

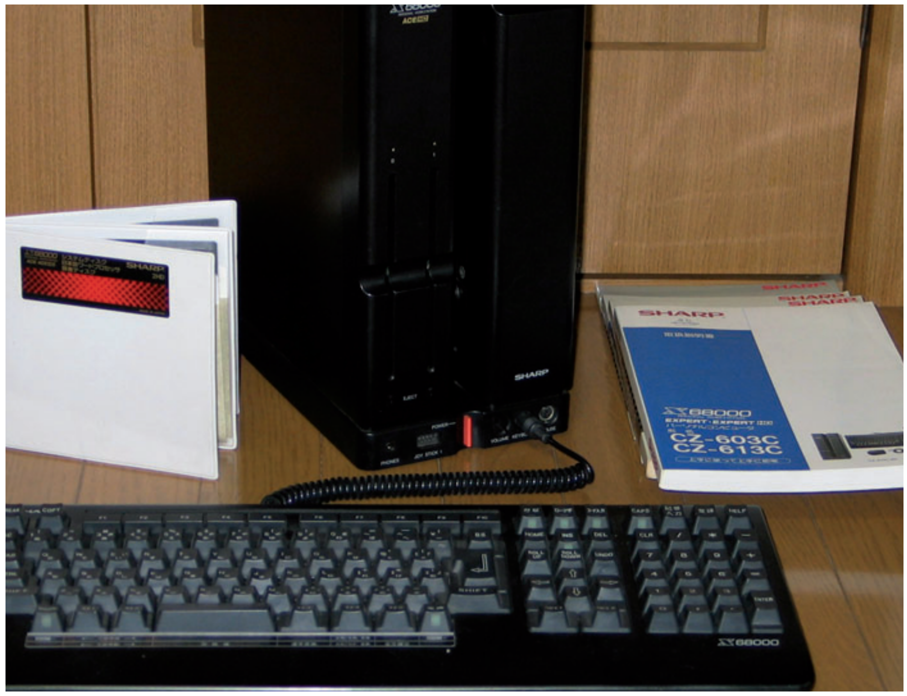




> "Publishing companies in the early days were computer shops with guys programming games in the back"



» For a computer that ended up gaining Fujitsu second place in Japan's market, the FM Towns has a lot of Western-developed games on it.











Five machines to discover

While there were many more diverging lines of hardware, with countless upgraded variations the following five 'brands' have some of the more interesting games

NEC PC88

Launched: 1981
Emulators: PC88Win, M88



The successor to NEC's PC8001 (1979) and follow-up PC6001, the PC88 saw several upgrades and became Japan's number one 8-bit computer, helping NEC to become the dominant force for nearly two decades, often holding over half of the market share. Although there is a lot of eroge, the PC88 also has hundreds of clean, fun games found nowhere else. Plus several conversions of Nintendo games by Hudson.

NEC PC98

Launched: 1982
Emulators: Neko Project 2, Anex



Japan's first 16-bit computer to support native scripts, PC98 was cloned by Seiko Epson, cementing NEC's control. Initially there was overlap between PC88 and PC98 software, but major updates meant that from 1986 there was a jump in quality. Final models incorporated a version of Windows, making them the best to import. For an article on buying one visit http://fullmotionvideo.free.fr.

Sharp X1

Launched: 1982
Emulators: Xmillennium



Sharp first competed against NEC with its MZ computer range, and later with its X1 range (based on the MZ2000). Though unsuccessful against the PC88, the X1 was generally a better gaming machine. Often when a game appeared on both, like the original *Thunder Force*, the X1 version was superior. Collectors should look out for the X1 Twin (pictured), which came with an integrated PC-Engine to play Hu-Cards.

Sharp X68000

Launched: 1987
Emulators: WinX68k, XM6



In 1987 Sharp released the powerful X68000, best known in the West for its arcade ports and *Castlevania* spin-off. Although it didn't usurp NEC, the X68000 saw many awesome exclusives now overlooked by Westerners too focused on its arcade ports. Ignore these as there are dozens of games you won't find anywhere else. Be warned, emulators struggle to output at the X68000's native resolution.

Fujitsu FM Towns

Launched: 1989
Emulators: Unz



Fujitsu carved an 8-bit niche with its FM range of computers. In 1989 it followed up with the multimedia-capable FM Towns. By 1991 Fujitsu had 8.2% market share, just under Seiko Epson. By 1995 this had doubled, giving Fujitsu second place to NEC. The Towns is weird – many games, some exclusive, are Western-developed by the likes of Psygnosis, Infogrames and LucasArts. Original CDs will run in any PC under Unz.

> **"For Bare Knuckle I used the PC88 and an original programming language I developed myself"**

powerful hardware launched by rival companies. Convergence with the West started in the early-Nineties, with manufacturers opting for Windows-compatible hardware that could handle Japanese scripts, and by 1996 the glorious era was over.

LOST ORIGINS

More of Japan's gaming history – and in turn today's market – has its roots in home computers, as opposed to Nintendo's Famicom, than many realise. For all that Nintendo started, it was the open hardware of NEC and other companies that allowed small groups to form and become giants.

The RPG tripod of Square, Enix and Falcom all started out on old computers. Square produced quite a few RPGs with very unusual battle systems for the PC88. Like *Cruise Chaser Blassty*, featuring a customisable first-person mecha, and *Genesis*, a *Mad Max*-style RPG. Enix, meanwhile, openly made adult-only titles. In fact, a lot of currently big companies like Koei once dabbled in pornographic games. They were young, they needed the money.

Falcom kept its nose clean and, shifting away from selling computers, created some of the best games in Japan, such as *Popful Mail* and *Sorcerian*, which made it Stateside. While it's true that the Japanese computer scene was mostly an isolated bubble, there was some minor cross-over. Examples include *Laser Squad*, the *Ultima* series and several LucasArts adventures reaching Japan, while Sierra ported Japanese games, such as *Silpheed* and Falcom's *Sorcerian*, over to DOS.

Cing, the company behind *Hotel Dusk*, was formed from ex-Riverhill Soft employees who started out developing such adventures as the JB Harold murder detective series. Some were ported to consoles and released in English, including a couple of obscure Laserdisc releases.

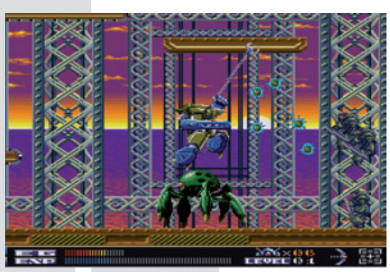
Bangai-O's creation is also attributable to Japanese micros, as Yaiman of Treasure told Sega: "*Bangai-O* started off as a remake of an X1 game called '*****', but then I started to mix in anime influences from Macross and Layzner, and pretty soon it didn't resemble the original, so its being a remake became 120 per cent a bluff/lie. I think the president also liked it, since it was just before the industry turned cold." While Sega's reporter purposely blanked out the name, the fan community searched the X1 archives until they discovered *Hover Attack*, also released on PC88, which, as the screenshots prove, is indeed similar.

Yuji Horii, best known for *Dragon Quest*, started programming on a PC6001, learning BASIC and then altering the code in commercial games. He went on to create one of Japan's earliest and much loved graphic adventures in 1983, *Portopia*, which has been fan-translated. Capturing Japan's imagination, countless other adventures went on to be made.

Koichi Nakamura, who went on to program *Dragon Quest*, achieved his first success with *Door-Door* in Enix's game-design competition, later forming his own studio, Chunsoft, when he was just 19.

Yuji Naka's introduction to computers was a Sharp MZ80, and at the start of the Eighties he bought his own PC8001, typing in games listings from magazines and improving his coding by finding and correcting the misprints. Several of his favourite games were arcade ports submitted by Koichi Nakamura.

Interestingly, systems such as the PC6001 are even where Fred Ford, of *Star Control 2* fame, started out. As he explains: "I was attending UC Berkeley and, responsible for paying my way, I answered a 'help wanted' ad for local software company Unison World. First I worked on some sort of Japanese monochrome handheld with a screen about one inch by four inches. I did a bowling game, a first-person biplane game, and a find-the-other-tank game. After that I moved onto the NEC, Fujitsu, and MSX. Some of the games I did for those systems were *Pillbox*, *Sea Bomber*, *Ground Support*,



» [X68000] Thumping rock soundtrack, sumptuous graphics, multiple crazy weapons and *Bionic Commando*-style swinging.



» [PC88] WiBArm has you roaming 3D worlds, fighting aliens in 2D and transforming from a mecha into a tank and flying jet.

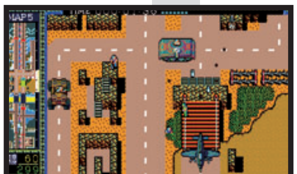
Five games to discover

There were so many fantastic games we've had to narrow it down to the most interesting titles exclusive to each system

Battle Gorilla

Format: NEC PC88
Year: 1988
By: Xtalsoft

Of all the games listed, this is the most difficult to learn. It's also the most rewarding. Imagine a roguelike-styled, tactical version of *Commando* where bullets and enemies only move when you do. Using Numkeys, Space and Esc at the menu: 1) choose map, 2) stats, 3) free mode, 4) buy weapons, 5) check weapons, 6) start. During the game, Space accesses the inventory and Shift shoots.



Night Slave

Format: NEC PC98
Year: 1996
By: Melody

An action-packed *Assault Suits Valken* clone crossed with the weapons system of *Gradius* plus (optional) scenes of lesbian bondage. Although not the smoothest game, *Night Slave*'s diversity makes it shine, as your mecha rampages through rainy jungles, snowy wastes and alien bases. The armaments system also has you levelling up your main- and sub-weapons in an RPG-like fashion using power-orbs.



Kagirinaki Tatakai

Format: Sharp X1
Year: 1983
By: H Ishikawa (Enix)

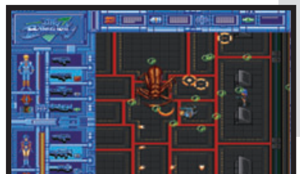
With its non-mirrored, separately drawn sprites for the walking animations, a range of enemies, fully destructible environments and convincing physics, this is a forgotten gem. While carrying three weapons or more has been done by most games since (except *Halo*), and plenty feature destructible environments (except *Halo*), this was released in 1983 on cassette tape. Still, miles better than *Halo*.



Die Bahnwelt

Format: X68000
Year: 1992 (now freeware)
By: Glodia

Despite predating it by a year, *Die Bahnwelt* feels like a Japanese version of *Chaos Engine* because of its anime cut-scenes, bizarre plot, and sidekicks with good AI who you can order to adopt various tactics such as conserve ammo, cover me, and so on. As you wander the ruins, you can collect weapons that can be changed in real time, find items and maps, unlock doors and stockpile ammo.



Tatsujin-Oh

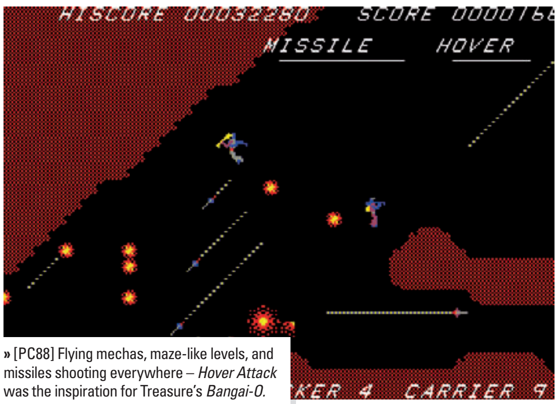
Format: FM Towns
Year: 1993
By: Toaplan

We were tempted to go for *Wrestle Angels* for some girl-on-girl fun, a shmup seemed more appropriate (and *Rayxanber* sadly isn't as good). Also known as *Truxton II*, this was the only home version of Toaplan's frenetic arcade shooter, ported by Ving. With relentless waves of enemies, this was dangerously intense. A simple power-up system and super bombs keep everything intuitive despite the high difficulty.



and some submarine game. During this time one of the two owners of Unison World split off to form Magicsoft [taking all employees with him]. I was working on a game for the MSX – I still have the eight-inch floppy – when Magicsoft ran out of money. Perhaps the most memorable thing of my time there was the hookers who would primp in front of the large, mirrored window that fronted our office on Adeline Street in Berkeley. Some things you can't forget even if you want to."

Yuzo Koshiro's early work was also on computers (lesser-known stuff includes music for *Misty Blue* and *Metroid*-inspired *The Scheme* on PC88), and after moving to consoles he continued to use older hardware. In an interview with Kikizo he explained: "For *Bare Knuckle* I used the PC88 and an original programming language I developed myself. The original was called MML, Music Macro Language. It's based on NEC's BASIC program, but I modified it heavily. It was more a BASIC-style language at first, but I modified it to be something more like Assembly. I called it 'Music Love'. I used it for all the *Bare Knuckle* games."



» [PC88] Flying mechas, maze-like levels, and missiles shooting everywhere – *Hover Attack* was the inspiration for Treasure's *Bangai-O*.



» *Technopolis* was a slightly naughty magazine that covered a variety of Japanese computers back in the day.

HIDDEN THREADS

With all of the above proving the importance of Japanese computers, it has to be asked: why aren't they archived online like, say, the Spectrum? Well, they are, except the Japanese tend to embed floppy and tape games inside JPG images, to deceive automated servers that would otherwise delete ZIP and RAR files.

The main English source for anything to do with Japanese computers is the Tokugawa forums, which we visited for information. Another reason for the lack of downloads, as one insider reluctantly revealed, is that about a decade ago, prior to Tokugawa's formation, there had been collaboration between East and West to dump and share Japan's retro computer games. Except the games ended up being sold online by one of the Western members… Apparently, Japan has yet to forgive this treason.

Tokugawa's founder, Ben, reveals some other difficulties of the scene: "You have to know how to run a DOS game using Japanese DOS; how to install a Japanese game on a virtual HDD from several floppies; run a game in basic mode, since sometimes that game was originally a tape; and the list goes on. TOSEC tried to establish a data-set for several Japanese retro computers, but for some games, because the save file on disk 12 was changed by two bytes, we ended up with another set for the whole game. There is a variety of dump formats for almost all machines, over ten for PC98, and emulators don't come with English directions."

Tokugawa's resident PC88 expert, Danjuro, also spoke about the difficulties in dumping games, explaining that you need a five-and-a-quarter-inch Amiga drive to read the floppies correctly – many also need to be cracked afterwards.

Other members answered questions, and all shared software freely, but there's a sadness visiting Tokugawa forums. All the hard work that goes into collecting over five thousand scanned covers and manuals, and dumping, renaming and organising thousands of games, falls to the callous whims of imageshack and rapishare. The vast databank of knowledge accumulated over hundreds of forum pages, is at risk of a Home of the Underdogs-style disappearance. Were it not for the hard work of these few fans, there'd be little online in English regarding the history of Japanese computers and the games that you'll find nowhere else.



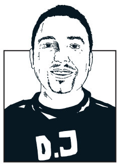
SPECIAL THANKS: Many thanks to Ben, Danjuro, Peter and everyone else at the Tokugawa forums for their expert help, photos and more information than we could ever print. Also, thanks to www.NFGgames.com and www.pc98.org for supplying us with specific images.

TKO

PUNCH-OUT!! THIS ISN'T



- **PUBLISHER:** ACCOLADE
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** C64
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



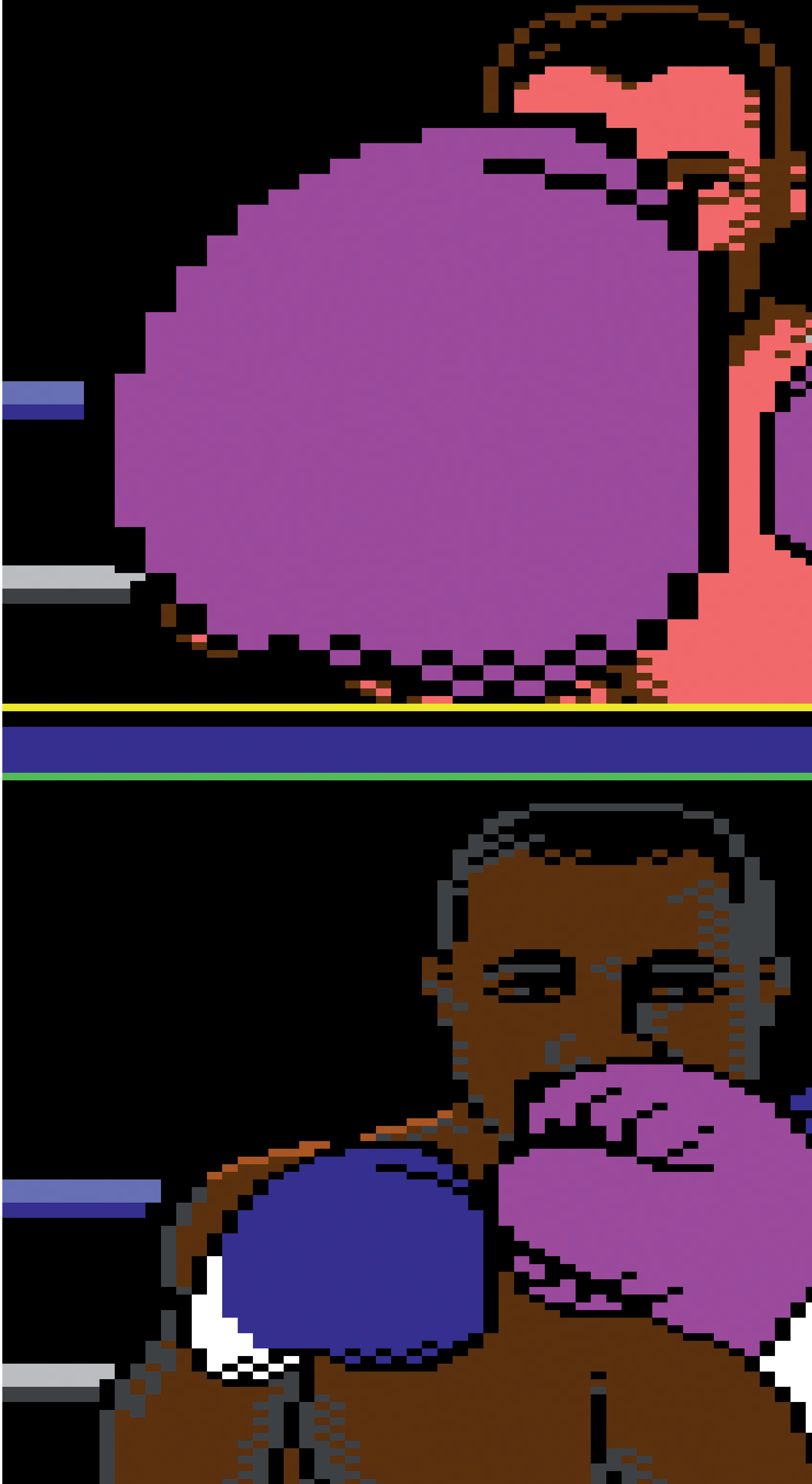
HISTORY

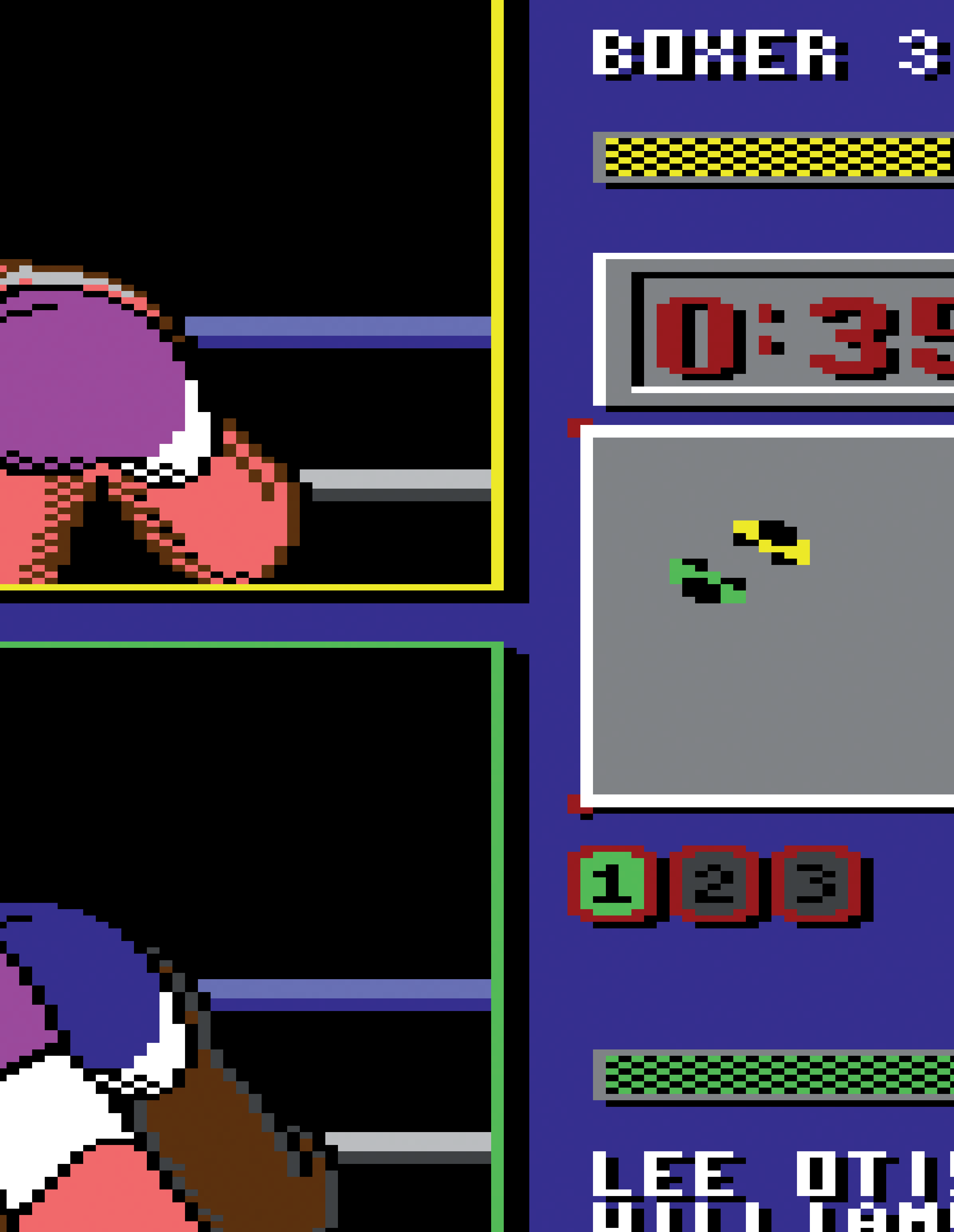
You have to feel sorry for Accolade's TKO. Here was a game that bravely tried to create its own spin on Frank Bruno's Boxing – itself inspired by Nintendo's Punch-Out!! – and instead it falls flat on its face.

While *TKO* opts for the same boxer's perspective that worked so well for *Punch-Out!!*, it failed to really follow any of the other rules set out by Nintendo's boxing gem. Instead of the over-the-top characters of *Punch-Out!!* and *Frank Bruno's Boxing*, *TKO* instead opts for bland, realistic-looking boxers, and in doing so, totally takes away any personality that the perspective might have offered. The visuals are nevertheless impressive and there are some nice little touches to depict bruised faces, but it's hard to become attached to your boxer and his opponent when they both look so utterly generic. The split-screen view, however, is a nice touch, and it's highly satisfying to see your boxer's blows fill the screen as he attempts to floor the opposition.

Sadly, *TKO*'s impressive visuals are the game's only saving grace, as the gameplay itself tries hard, but just doesn't cut the mustard. The biggest issue here is that *TKO*'s timing is completely out of whack, and while your boxer has access to a fair number of different moves, they usually land with the randomness of falling rain. You'll often find yourself resorting to simple button mashing in order to get the job done, which usually turns out to be far more effective than playing the game properly.

Granted, there are several humorous moments – watching your opponent's head crack back after a quick uppercut is particularly satisfying – and the two-player mode is something of a saving grace, but it's just not enough. A boxing game – or any fighting game, for that matter – excels when it gives you a sense of control over what's happening on screen. With *TKO*, lady luck gets far too much of a look in. Still, it certainly does look nice.




BOXER 3
1 2 3



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Hudson Soft – Part 2

In this second and concluding part of our exclusive retrospective on one of Japan's favourite videogame publishers, Damien McFerran investigates the changing fortunes of Hudson Soft throughout the Nineties and revisits the recent fall and rise of this veteran firm

Throughout the Nineties, Hudson fought battles on multiple fronts and with varying degrees of success. In Japan it continued to throw its weight behind the popular 8-bit PC-Engine console it had developed alongside Japanese electronics giant NEC, and the introduction of CD-ROM technology towards the end of the Eighties meant Hudson was charting a course that many other console manufacturers came to follow.

As if that wasn't enough, plans were also in action to join the rapidly escalating portable war with the PC-Engine GT. Basically a miniaturised PC-Engine, the machine was billed as the Rolls Royce of handhelds when it was released, further solidifying Hudson and NEC's reputation as purveyors of serious gaming equipment. However, in the US this coveted status was rather less pronounced. The launch of the TurboGrafx-16 – essentially a Westernised version of the PC-Engine – was markedly less successful than its Japanese counterpart had been, with the entrenched Nintendo and resurgent Sega (buoyed by the recent unveiling of the 16-bit Genesis/Mega Drive) proving to be fearsome opponents.

INSTANT EXPERT

The PC-FX was envisaged as an all-in-one multimedia device, and could even receive faxes

The ill-fated SuperGrafx console was one of Hudson and NEC's more notable failures – only five dedicated games were ever released for it, but it could also run PC-Engine HuCards

In America, Hudson Entertainment is heavily involved with mobile phone gaming and even distributes the music of up-and-coming R&B artists

In total, the PC-Engine line sold over 10 million units worldwide

In the mid-Nineties, Hudson developed *Hi-Ten Bomberman*, which used then-expensive HD TV technology to grant multiplayer action on an unprecedented scale

Some of Hudson's PlayStation titles are best forgotten – *Bomberman Kart*, anyone?

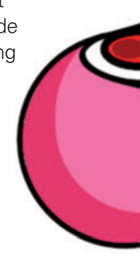
More recently, Hudson has branched out into developing applications for Apple's iPhone

Saturn Bomberman was the first game in the series to be playable over a network

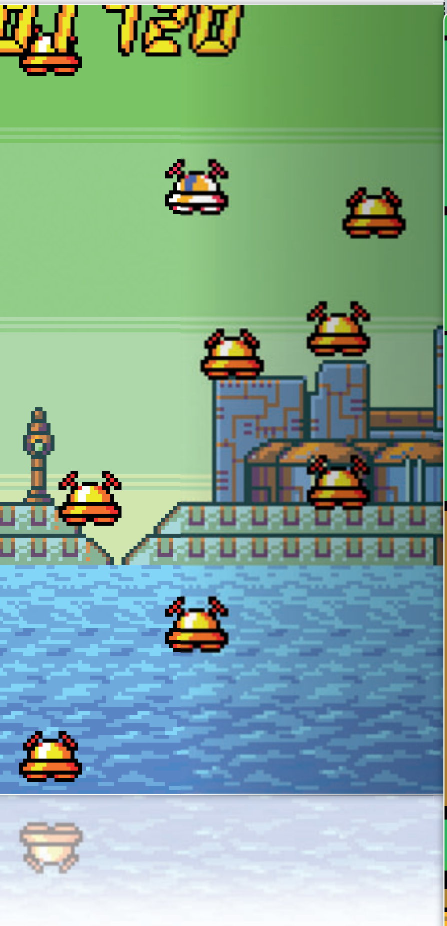
Hudson currently employs over 500 people worldwide

The PC-Engine GT was essentially a portable PC-Engine and was released in the States as the TurboExpress

In addition to all this, Hudson was continuing to provide third-party support to Nintendo's ageing Famicom/NES format: the system responsible for giving the developer early successes such as *Bomberman* and *Lode Runner*. You might assume that these cross-platform commitments might have been to blame for the dismal performance of the TG-16, but former vice president of sales and marketing for Hudson Entertainment John Lee insists this wasn't the case. "The failure of the TG-16 had nothing to do with continuing to develop Famicom software, because the games were actually better than Genesis games," he comments. "It was some initial mistakes that were made in ordering too many units, therefore tying up the budget and not being able to fight the marketing battle that really decided that war. The Genesis and SNES won because of outstanding marketing. TG-16 arguably had better games, but ultimately lost because the marketing was not as effective."

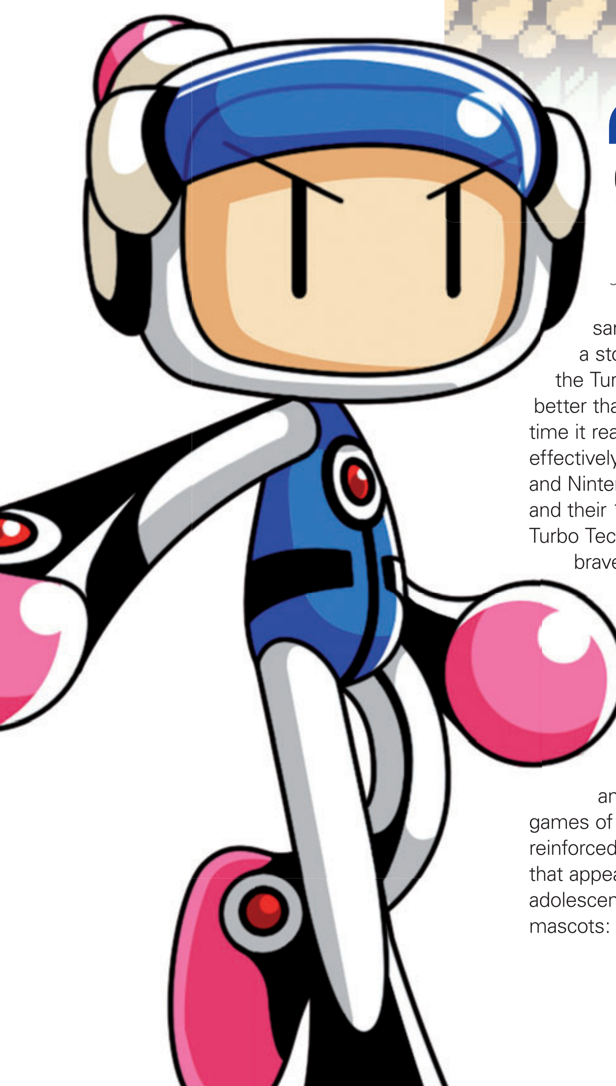


The establishment of Turbo Technologies Inc (TTI) – another joint venture between NEC and Hudson – paved the way for the release of updated hardware in the form of the Turbo Duo, which was basically a TurboGrafx-16 and CD-ROM attachment fused into one console. The Japanese version of this



ADVENTURE ISLAND 3





> **"TG-16 arguably had better games, but Genesis and SNES had outstanding marketing"**
>
> JOHN LEE, FORMER VP OF SALES AND MARKETING, HUDSON ENTERTAINMENT

same machine had gone down a storm in its homeland and while the Turbo Duo performed moderately better than its predecessor, by the time it reached the US market TTI was effectively fighting for third place – Sega and Nintendo's lead was just too great and their 16-bit machines were dominant. Turbo Technologies Inc had made a brave attempt at cracking the North American market, but ultimately its rivals had been too strong.

The fact that the line-up of software available for both the TurboGrafx-16 and Turbo Duo was distinctly Eastern in flavour hadn't helped matters, either. While it's true that Sega and Nintendo also had plenty of games of Japanese origin, they were ably reinforced by strong Western releases that appealed to the average American adolescent. Another key issue was mascots: Mario and Sonic were, by this point, household names to rival the likes of Mickey Mouse and Ronald McDonald, and yet all Turbo Technologies Inc had to counter this was a cave boy called Bonk who happened to attack enemies with his massive head. While the Bonk titles were unquestionably brilliant, the image they projected just wasn't cool enough.

The story was markedly different in the Land of the Rising Sun, however. Despite the hiccup that was the stillborn SuperGrafx console – a misjudged attempt to steal some thunder away from the launch of the Mega Drive – NEC and Hudson continued to keep Sega in third position while fighting it out with Nintendo, which was now reasserting its supremacy thanks to the launch of the Super Famicom/SNES. Again, Hudson's loyalties were divided and the firm continued to produce games for Nintendo's hardware. SNES *Super Bomberman* is cited by many fans as their favourite version and was so popular that four SNES-exclusive ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

Hudson was founded by **2** brothers

There were **11** varieties of PC-Engine released

There have been **8** different entries in the highly popular *Adventure Island* series

Measuring **14cm x 14cm x 3.8cm**, the PC-Engine is the smallest home console ever

Hudson has created **8** versions of the *Mario Party* series on Nintendo's behalf

2003's *DreamMix TV World Fighters* brought together **9** famous brands for a *Smash Bros*-style slug-fest on PS2 and GameCube – sadly it was Japan-only

The company was founded on **18** May **1978**

[SNES] The Super Nintendo version of *Bomberman* is considered to be one of the best in the entire franchise.





[Wii] The *Mario Party* series has made plenty of cash for Nintendo, but Hudson has been responsible for the programming duties over the years.



[WiiWare] *Adventure Island: The Beginning* is just one of many excellent Hudson titles to make a return via WiiWare.

> “[Konami] allowed us to invest in more product and get the company jump-started again”
>
> JOHN GREINER, FORMER PRESIDENT, HUDSON ENTERTAINMENT

sequels promptly followed. Other PC-Engine favourites – such as *PC Kid/Bonk* and *Adventure Island* – also appeared on the rival console. It was a solid indication of Hudson’s unusual position within the industry: although it had poured tremendous resources into the production of the PC-Engine brand, it was clear the developer didn’t intend to put all of its eggs in one basket. Hudson remained a third-party studio at heart and for the early part of the Nineties this dual strategy worked well. Not only did the company make considerable money on its NES and SNES output, but it also turned a huge profit on every single PC-Engine HuCard



Hudson also pushed some of its premier characters out into the arcades, as this flyer attests.

sold, because it owned the rights to the technology behind the format.

However, despite success at home, it was during this time that Hudson’s already dire standing in the US took a nosedive. Hudson USA closed it doors in 1995 after seven years of publishing the company’s titles stateside and for the next few years the company relied on publishing deals with other companies in order to market its games in the West. One such deal was brokered with Virgin Interactive, which released the 3D fighting title *Bloody Roar* in Europe. Similar agreements took place with the likes of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Activision and Konami, the latter of which then became a much larger influence on Hudson’s fortunes – as you’ll find out if you read on.

Growing Pains

As the 32-bit era dawned there were whispers about a successor to the veteran PC-Engine hardware, which by 1994 had clocked up its eleventh iteration with the remodelled PC-Engine Duo-RX. Once again Hudson and NEC decided to work together on the creation of this new super-console, which was reportedly at the design stages as early as 1992. Codenamed ‘Tetsujin’ (Japanese for ‘Iron Man’) the specifications of this beast were fearsome to say the least. Like its 8-bit forerunner, it boasted custom-made graphics hardware courtesy of Hudson’s talented R&D department and utilised CD-ROM technology for storage. Early demos showed detailed 3D environments that were lightyears ahead of what was currently available.

ON THE DOWNLOAD



Not surprising, given its history of producing simple, playable videogames, Hudson has been a strong supporter of Apple’s iPhone – check out http://www.dothehudson.net/en for more info – and Nintendo’s Virtual Console and WiiWare, releasing a number of retro-centric titles and remakes on Nintendo’s online services.

Currently found on the virtual shop shelves of WiiWare are 3D remakes of Hudson’s early TurboGrafx-16 titles, including *Star Soldier R* (pictured), *Adventure Island: The Beginning* and the fourth instalment of the *Crush Pinball* franchise, *Alien Crush Returns*. Hudson has also announced that it has plans to release a remake of its hex-based strategy game *Military Madness* across VC, XBLA and PSN. This game also received a 3D reworking on PlayStation in 1998.

However, **Retro Gamer**’s current favourite downloadable title to come from the Hudson stable is Natsume’s excellent *Omega V*, which was released on Xbox Live Arcade. Best described as a glorious mix of *Forgotten Worlds* meets *R-Type Final*, it was awarded an impressive 91 and a Retro Sizzler back in issue 49. We think it’s one of the best modern-day shooters money can buy.

SIX OF THE BEST

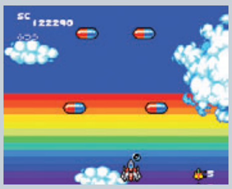
Soldier Blade (1992, PC-Engine)

The final HuCard-based entry in the long-running *Star Soldier* series, *Soldier Blade* is a stunning achievement when you consider the hardware. The enormous sprites, intense speed and eye-bleeding amounts of on-screen action actually make *Soldier Blade* look a little bit like a 32-bit shooter at times. We'll go out on a limb and say that this is quite possibly the greatest blaster on the entire format.



Star Parodier (1995, PC-Engine Super CD-ROM)

Taking inspiration from Konami's popular *Parodius* series, *Star Parodier* is a light-hearted vertical shooter that takes the *Star Soldier* franchise and gives it a humorous spin. Company mascot Bomberman is also along for the ride, as is a flying PC-Engine console with arms and legs. A US release – under the title of *Fantasy Star Soldier* – was planned but never materialised.



DoReMi Fantasy: Milon no DokiDoki Daibouken (1996, Super Famicom)

The sequel to the crushingly dull *Milon's Secret Castle* is so vastly superior to its predecessor it's hard to believe they're part of the same lineage. Gorgeous visuals coupled with incredibly addictive platforming gameplay result in a truly exceptional 16-bit title. Sadly it never saw release in the West, although it is now available on Wii's Virtual Console.



Ninja Cop (2003, Game Boy Advance)

Playing like a glorious fusion of Sega's *Shinobi*, Capcom's *Bionic Commando* and Taito's *Elevator Action Returns*, this remains one of Game Boy Advance's hidden gems. Released as *Ninja Five-O* in Japan, the game is incredibly rare and its reputation keeps its value high. However, this is one time when you won't mind paying through the nose – this might just be the best GBA game in existence.



Battle Heat (1994, PC-FX)

You might find the inclusion of *Battle Heat* in our Six Of The Best boxout a little strange, but the fact remains that this game is probably the only FMV title that really works. Thanks to the PC-FX's zippy access time, the anime-style fight scenes link seamlessly with one another, creating a truly unique experience – but sadly one that only very few people will ever get to enjoy.



Bomberman Live (2007, Xbox Live Arcade)

There's absolutely no doubt about it, *Bomberman*'s appeal lies in its multiplayer action. Therefore it's not surprising that this Xbox Live Arcade release ranks as an essential download. Squaring up against seven other human opponents is a fantastic experience and opens up a whole new world of weary-eyed addiction. At just 800 MS points, this is a steal.



However, Hudson and NEC were understandably reluctant to upset the current success of the PC-Engine in Japan. Officially announcing that new hardware was on its way, predictably, resulted in a drop in sales for the 8-bit machine. Bearing in mind that Nintendo adopted exactly the same approach with the SNES, such a strategy was not all that surprising. Sega and Sony – the two companies that had the least to lose by ploughing headlong into the next generation – duly released details of their respective hardware, sending the videogame industry into a 32-bit-induced fever.

When it became clear that the current crop of consoles was on its last legs, Hudson and NEC took the now-outdated Iron Man design and tinkered with it to make it a little more respectable. The result was the PC-FX – a system that bucked the trend by specialising in high-quality FMV and contained no dedicated three-dimensional hardware whatsoever. Not surprisingly, it bombed. Although its use of JPEG video instead of compressed video – a choice that gave outstanding quality thanks to the fact that each frame was in fact a separate, hi-res image – resulted in what were arguably the best FMV-based games ever created, it was painfully clear that Hudson and NEC had backed the wrong horse entirely. Sony's immensely powerful PlayStation was capable of replicating cutting-edge three-dimensional coin-ops while the PC-FX could barely rustle up a few flat-shaded polygons. This unmitigated hardware disaster marked the end of Hudson and NEC's previously fruitful relationship. This scenario would have serious repercussions for Hudson in particular. Without the vital revenue stream generated by a successful console, the events of the next few years were to leave the firm reeling.

FANCY A BONK?

The hilariously named *Bonk* (or *PC Kid*, to give him his Japanese moniker) was one of the few TurboGrafx-16 titles that truly struck a cord with American gamers. However, he's been suspiciously quiet over the past decade – something that John Lee tried to rectify during his time with Hudson Entertainment. "We created a five-minute video showcase with gaming industry heavyweights in the US and asked them to share their thoughts on bringing *Bonk* back," reveals Lee. "We also created a mock demo of what a next-gen *Bonk* game would look like, and it was pretty darn amazing. It was still a 2D platformer but set in a 3D environment. We brought all this back to Japan, and pitched to the key executives there. Unfortunately, the budget they agreed was not enough to do a next-gen game properly. We felt like we only had one shot to bring *Bonk* back, so we decided to hold off on making the project until we could come to an agreement on how big to make the game. I do believe that there is still potential for a great next-gen *Bonk*."



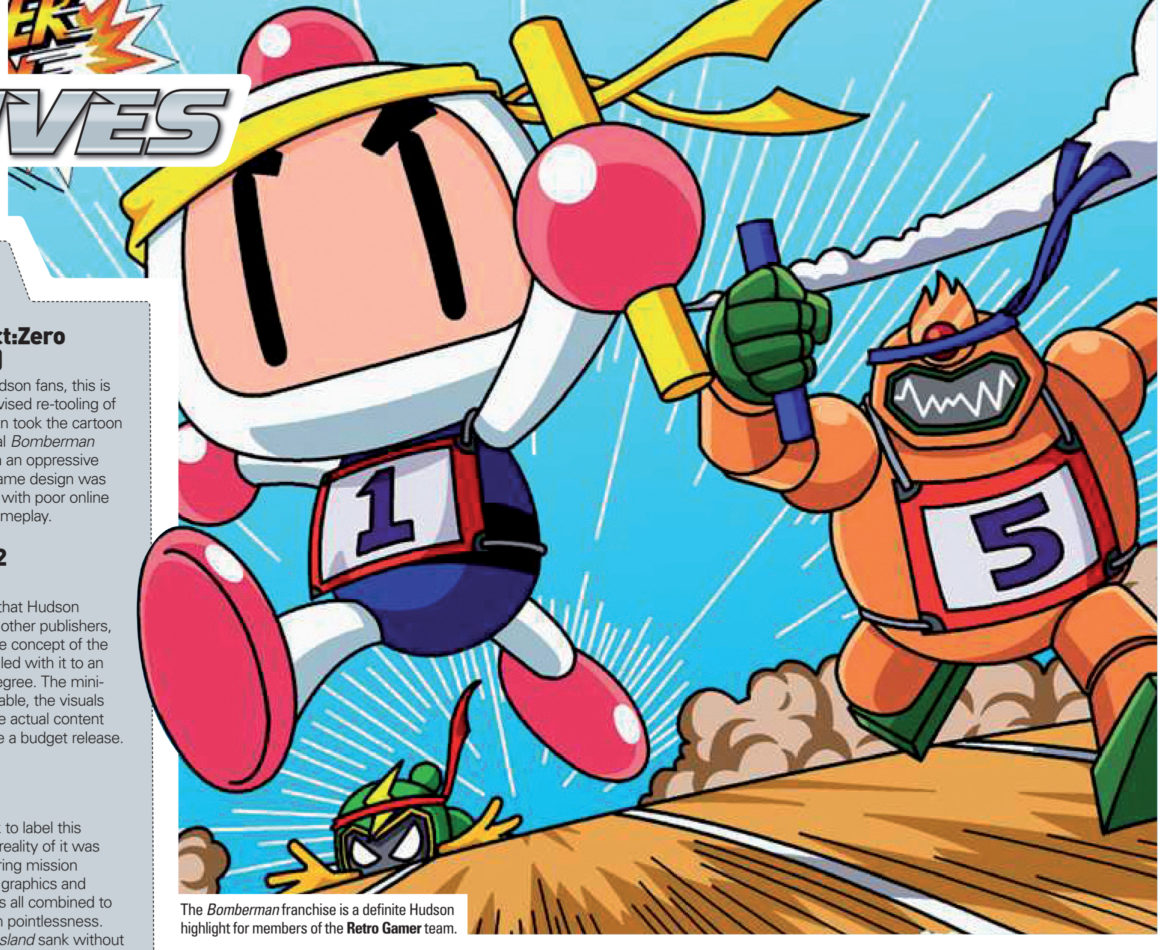


The Bubble Bursts

In 1997 the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank in Japan crashed as the Asian financial "bubble" started collapsing around their ears. "It was Hudson's sole bank at the time, and it was very strong," explained former president of Hudson Entertainment John Greiner when he was interviewed by Gamasutra's Brandon Sheffield back in 2007. "It was one of the five major banks in Japan, but was hiding many skeletons in the closet." Hokkaido Takushoku – or 'Takugin' as it is affectionately known by the Japanese public – had been offering finance at around 120 per cent of real estate value, when the accepted level was 70 per cent. The reasoning behind such irregularities was that, due to the fact that property values were on the rise it was seen as acceptable practice to lend money at a higher value, because eventually the property would be worth more. Sadly, when the bubble burst it left banks like Takugin in hot water. In 1997 it all came to a head and the bank was declared bankrupt.

While Hudson was naturally not at fault for Takugin's questionable working practices, such events made it hard to fund further production of games. "All these bad loans became obvious and good companies like Hudson were pulled into that because we had to take out loans to make games – everybody does," continues Greiner. "You don't have a ton of cash that you're sitting on in most cases. So those loans came calling when the bank fell. We had to have a stock offering at that time." The resultant flotation was successful and generated the required cash to pay off the firm's loans, but naturally left Hudson in quite a weakened state. Enter Konami. "They came to the forefront and said 'Yeah, we'll invest in your company'," recalls Greiner.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



The *Bomberman* franchise is a definite Hudson highlight for members of the **Retro Gamer** team.

SIX TO MISS



Bomberman Act:Zero
(2006, Xbox 360)
Widely despised by Hudson fans, this is possibly the most ill-advised re-tooling of a franchise ever. Hudson took the cartoon aesthetics of the original *Bomberman* and replaced them with an oppressive cyberpunk style. The game design was even more depressing, with poor online features and shoddy gameplay.



Fuzion Frenzy 2
(2007, Xbox 360)
One of the many titles that Hudson developed on behalf of other publishers, *Fuzion Frenzy 2* took the concept of the Xbox original and meddled with it to an almost unacceptable degree. The mini-games were less enjoyable, the visuals were off-putting and the actual content made the game feel like a budget release.



Wing Island
(2006, Wii)
While many were quick to label this '*Pilotwings* on Wii' the reality of it was a lot less appealing. Boring mission objectives, N64-quality graphics and decidedly ropey controls all combined to make this an exercise in pointlessness. Not surprisingly, *Wing Island* sank without a trace at retail.



Sonic Shuffle
(2000, Dreamcast)
After helping Nintendo with *Mario Party* Hudson then hopped over to the Dreamcast to assist Sonic Team with this similar offering. The action takes place on a playing board, and the player is expected to participate in mini-games. Sadly, the games were dull and the music was god-awful. Not Sonic's finest hour.



Swat Kats
(1995, Super Nintendo)
One of Hudson's less productive licensing deals, this lacklustre platformer is based on a little-known American cartoon series. The fact that the TV show was pulled the year before the game was launched probably didn't help matters, but the generally poor quality of the title consigned it to obscurity. Thank goodness.



World Sports Competition
(1992, TurboGrafx-16)
Hudson clearly took a big leaf out of Konami's book with this particular title, because it's obviously based on *Track & Field*. It does at least try to do things a little differently – the shooting range game was innovative for the time – but the whole package ends up being a lot less inspired than Konami's classic.

> **"The chance to bring back game franchises I adored as a kid [...] only comes your way once"**
>
> JOHN LEE, FORMER VP OF SALES AND MARKETING, HUDSON ENTERTAINMENT

"That allowed us to invest in a lot more product and get the company jump-started again." The end result was that Konami become Hudson's largest shareholder, and a few years later in 2005 purchased even more shares to give it 53.99 per cent of all Hudson stock.

During this period of boardroom upheaval, Hudson's name faded a little from public view. However, the company was far from being idle. To keep the cash flowing, it produced titles for other publishers including Sega, Nintendo and its new business acquaintance Konami. Titles such as *Sonic Shuffle* (Dreamcast), *Mario Party* (Nintendo 64) and *Ninja Five-O/Ninja Cop* (Game Boy Advance) gained recognition for their respective distributors, but behind the scenes it was Hudson handling the programming. However, the highly respected moniker was not to lie dormant for much longer. In 2003 the first steps were taken to re-establish the company on US soil with the formation of Hudson Entertainment.

Coming To America (Again)

Leading this charge was Greiner himself, who had gained the trust of Hudson's Japanese management after 15 years of dutiful service. John Lee worked closely with Greiner during this period and relished the task of bringing the Hudson name back in the US. "Rebuilding a brand from the ground up is always going to be a challenge," he comments. "But I've always

TIMELINE

- **1989** THE ILL-FATED SUPERGRAFX CONSOLE IS RELEASED
- **1992** THE CORE TECHNOLOGY DIVISION IS ESTABLISHED
- **1994** THE 32-BIT PC-FX CONSOLE HITS JAPANESE STORE SHELVES
- **1995** HUDSON RELEASES VERTICAL FORCE FOR NINTENDO'S VIRTUAL BOY
- **1997** THE HOKKAIDO TAKUSHOKU BANK CRASHES, CAUSING HUDSON FINANCIAL GRIEF
- **1999** *MARIO PARTY* IS RELEASED ON N64 – HUDSON HANDLES THE PROGRAMMING DUTIES
- **2000** HUDSON ENTERS THE JAPANESE STOCK MARKET
- **2001** HUDSON ACQUIRES THE SAPPORO DIVISION OF KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT STUDIO
- **2002** THE FIRST HUDSON-PUBLISHED GAMECUBE GAME IS RELEASED: *BLOODY ROAR EXTREME*
- **2003** HUDSON ENTERTAINMENT IS ESTABLISHED – A WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARY IN SAN FRANCISCO, US
- **2004** HIDETOSHI ENDO BECOMES PRESIDENT OF HUDSON SOFT
- **2005** KONAMI CORPORATION, NOW HOLDING 53.99% OF ALL HUDSON STOCK, BECOMES HUDSON'S MAJORITY SHAREHOLDER AND PARENT COMPANY
- **2006** THE FAMOUS HUDSON CARAVAN MAKES A RETURN WITH THE 2006 *BOMBERMAN* CUP
- **2007** JAPANESE HQ RELOCATES TO MIDTOWN EAST, AKASAKA, MINATO-KU, TOKYO
- **2008** WITH THE LAUNCH OF NINTENDO'S WiiWARE SERVICE, HUDSON RELEASES TITLES SUCH AS *STAR SOLDIER R* AND *TETRIS PARTY*



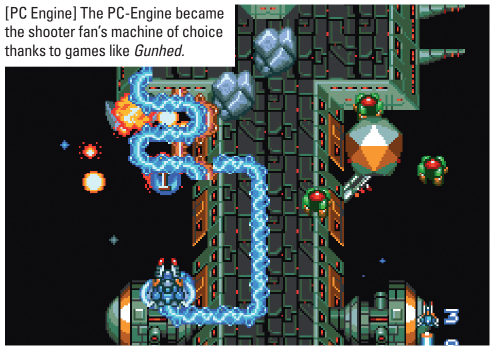
Former Hudson Entertainment president *John Greiner* with fellow execs Kunji Katsuki and Seiichi Ishigaki







Hudson employee Takahashi Meijin remains as popular as ever and is still actively involved with promoting the company's products today.



[PC Engine] The PC-Engine became the shooter fan's machine of choice thanks to games like *Gunhed*.

been driven by doing things that I'm really passionate about. And in this case, the chance to bring back game franchises and a game company I adored as a kid seemed like an opportunity that only comes your way once." Lee pioneered an approach now commonplace in today's market – he opened up the lines of communication between the developer and the gamer.

"We went out of our way to connect with the fans of old, and bring on new ones," Lee explains. "We were really one of the first companies to fully embrace the concept of talking to gamers directly in forums and not disguised as some random person. We were open about who we were and candid in our conversations. We redesigned our website to make it more editorial driven, which was quite controversial back then. We embraced podcasts, blogs and one-on-one meetings with bloggers and fans. We didn't just give exclusives to the big game sites and magazines; we gave them to the little guys, who typically never got a call back from a big game company."

These undeniably groundbreaking tactics didn't always sit well with Lee's superiors, however. "Even though John Greiner was very supportive of our more open and unrefined approach, the corporate office back in Japan was extremely wary of it," says Lee. "And rightfully so. No one was doing anything like this. It's hard to break from tradition, and tradition in the gaming industry was to guard your secrets closely. Tradition was to sell your game based on a strict one-way message. But I knew that we had to embrace this change at Hudson – not because we wanted to be cutting edge, but because Hudson grew up with a culture of catering to its fans. While we couldn't outspend the big companies, we could do a better job in creating a more personal connection with our audience."

Some of the events arranged by Lee and his team were unorthodox to say the least. "We were the first company to host gamer day events that focused exclusively on bloggers and fans," he reveals. "We'd have these barbecues in the back of the office parking lot, which we would turn into a big block party. We would invite a local punk band and we'd make a music video out of a guy in a Bomberman suit – our creative director, actually – being thrown into a mosh pit, and then post it up on the internet."

Despite practically throwing the rulebook out the window when it came to communicating with its customer base, Hudson is still very much in touch with its past, which is good to know. The company has recently been a staunch supporter of Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console service and has also extended support to Nintendo's WiiWare venture with retro-remakes such as *Alien Crush Returns*, *Star Soldier R* and *Adventure Island: The Beginning*. However, it's clear that these are low-key, likeable projects that will please devoted fans but aren't likely to generate huge mountains of cash, as was the case in the NES and PC-Engine era.

But then that isn't the objective of the 'new' Hudson, according to John Lee. "Let's put it this way, Hudson is not the kind of company that would make *Gears Of War* or *Halo*," he states emphatically. "Hudson isn't focused on pushing specs or building massive teams to make a big game. Their development philosophy is really driven around finding a game hook and making it fun. They start with a simple concept, which can be picked up really quickly. Hudson is a very developer-orientated company, so they are coming up with new ideas all the time that are simply fun in concept. Hudson is also really driven by creating games that bring people together. They created *Bomberman*, the granddaddy of party games. All of this grew out of their historical roots – a small family company with quirky founders and a quirky culture."

MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

Hudson has always prided itself on doing things a little differently, and E3 booth babes are no exception. "I never liked the concept of hiring booth babes who just stand around all day and look like they would rather be somewhere else," explains John Lee. "So I put together a posse of models who would basically help make our clients' and media partners' lives easier at E3. But these weren't ordinary models – beyond being drop-dead gorgeous and having great personalities, they were sharp as a whistle. We spent a whole day training them on the history of Hudson, and made sure they knew how to play our games and pitch them. However, the buzz got out that we hired female escorts, which, understandably, got me into trouble with Hudson HQ. There were a couple of projects like this that got me into some hot water, but even the naysayers eventually jumped on board because it's hard to argue with results."

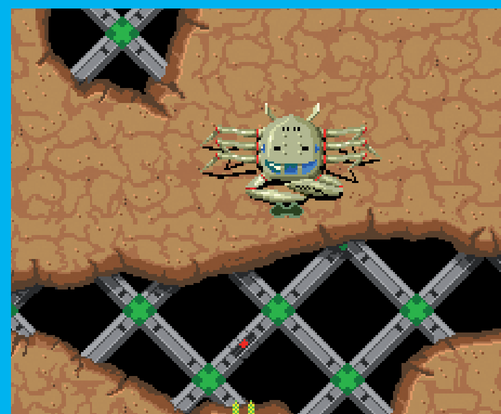




WHY YOU MUST PLAY… SLAP FIGHT



[Arcade] Taking on the first boss, using homing missiles.



[Arcade] These guys were scuttling ten years before E3 or PlayStations were invented.



[Arcade] Where does this staircase go? Does it signify something or nothing?

THE MID-EIGHTIES WAS A WONDERFUL ERA FOR SHOOT-'EM-UP FANS. EACH TIME YOU VISITED THE ARCADE, YOU'D DISCOVER ANOTHER NEW TITLE, PUSHING THE GENRE FORWARD. ENTER... SLAP FIGHT



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
» **DEVELOPER:** TOAPLAN
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
» **GENRE:** SHOOTER
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £70+

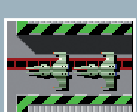
While Taito started the shoot-'em-up craze in 1978 with *Space Invaders*, *Slap Fight*'s developer, Toaplan, represented the category's future. The talented Japanese developer went on to create many iconic shooters, and when the company folded in 1994, some of the staff founded Cave, a firm that's dominated the style ever since.

But let's get back to 1986. *Slap Fight* took direction from two of the greatest shmups of the time. The most obvious is *Xevious*, with its dome-shaped enemies that spat bullets, and tanks that followed paths on the ground. But one element of Namco's classic wasn't used: flying enemies. *Slap Fight* had only ground-based attackers, and yet this design constraint led to a burst of creativity. The levels went beyond the staples of the era – land, air, sea, starfields – and the enemies were equally unique. The tube level, for instance, consists of glass tubes, patrolled by automated drones. You can only shoot them when they reach a junction of two pipes, at which point they fire bullets in all directions.

Slap Fight's second big influence was *Gradius*. Toaplan used the same token/menu weapon system, with yellow stars to collect from destroyed enemies. In addition to the usual speed and shield power ups, your weapon choices included bullets, a short-range bomb, a long-range laser, and homing missiles. There are also wing power ups that boost the current main weapon but increase your size – making you an easier target to hit – and an auxiliary side laser that fires in conjunction with any other weapon.

Slap Fight is set on an unnamed planet, invaded by wicked brain Gaudy. The setting and plot varies from port to port, but we're following the original arcade version. You've been given the experimental spaceship SW475 and your mission is to blow Gaudy and its forces to smithereens. The ship is controlled by a standard eight-way joystick, with button one for fire and button two (the space bar in home computer ports) to select weapon upgrades. Do you go for the homing missiles? Watch out, some areas will pop up decoy towers to lure your projectiles from enemies. If you choose the laser, do you hammer the fire button for close shots, or hold it down for a longer bolt, leaving you unprotected? If you use the bomb, can you get close enough to damage the boss? These are but a few of the tactics and

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



NO FLYING ENEMIES
You'll spot a few helicopters and jets on the ground, but not a single enemy in the air. All comparable Eighties games have flying foes.



HOMING DECOYS
So, you think you're clever with your homing missiles? What if Gaudy pops up a few decoy towers to confuse your missiles?



PLANTS
Normally, plants don't respond well to damage, but one *SF* weapon unearths plants. And one of them feeds plants to give you points.



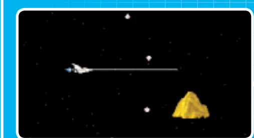
DRONES AND BOTS
Slap Fight's ground-based enemies go way beyond tanks and gun emplacements, with its famous tube drones and 'lattice bots'.

INFLUENCES

The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Slap Fight**



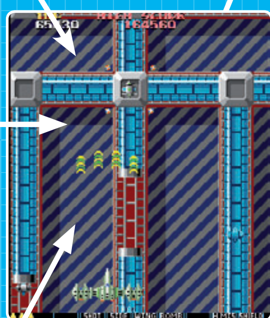
■ **XEVIOUS** [1982] ARCADE
Another vertical scroller with metallic tanks and anti-aircraft emplacements. *Slap Fight*'s creator also liked the idea of a long, looping game with no end.



■ **GRADIUS** [1985] ARCADE
Yes, *Gradius*, we'll borrow that weapon scheme of yours. We'll also be needing your idea of levels as a graphical reward for progress.



■ **TIGER HELI** [1985] ARCADE
Toaplan's previous game was a vital stepping stone. It recognised the need for good sprite design, inspiring music, and leaving some secrets to discover.





■ **RAIDEN** [1990] ARCADE
***Slap Fight*'s homing missiles live on in Raiden's arsenal. Metallic enemies are present, and the game also loops with faster enemies each time.**



■ **V-FIVE** [1993] ARCADE
V-Five uses the same musician and power-up system as *SF*. Sadly the US release (known as *Grind Stormer*) used standard weapon pick ups.



■ **DONPACHI** [1995] ARCADE
The first bullet-hell title. Programmer Tsuneki Ikeda said in 1999 that he came to like dodging bullets back when he played *Slap Fight*.

"This limited, Japan-only release was made with love"

consequences to weigh up as you move through *Slap Fight*'s attractive zones.

The game begins in a large medieval village, but the landscape becomes increasingly mechanical as you make progress and Gaudy's influence increases. The graphics are colourful and effective while the soundtrack is superb. Masahiro Yuge created a series of pieces that sound like a symphony, urging you on. The lead instrument sounds very much like an orchestra's string section, which adds to the epic quality.

But beyond the attractive surface, *Slap Fight* is a game of mysteries. What happens if you begin your game passively, dodging enemies for as long as possible? Which of your weapons affect the green plants? What does the tiny staircase signify, near the end of the courtyard? How do you trigger the rarely seen automated helper to appear? You could find the answers on Google, but it's much more fun to discover them in the game.

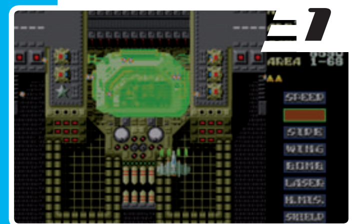
Arcade cab/Supergun owners will find *Slap Fight* PCBs for around £30-£60. *Slap Fight* has been playable on MAME since 1998, but only the clones work due to a protection chip on the original board.

Slap Fight's conversion to home computers and consoles was eagerly awaited. So much so that Sensible Software's *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* included a homage called *Slap N Tickle*. Probe's official efforts on Spectrum and Amstrad were less amusing. Imagine's Commodore 64 port was great, but its Atari ST effort was terrible. And then there was MNM's Mega Drive port. This limited – fewer than ten thousand copies – Japan-only release was made with love. The original mode improves upon the arcade game, with remixed music, *Gradius*-style weapon announcements ('speed up') and four user-selectable difficulty levels. MNM also included a whole new game, *Slap Fight MD*, which is something of an unofficial sequel… with new levels and a mixture of old and new enemies that suit the *Slap Fight* universe. *Slap Fight MD* also features music by Yuzo Koshiro, of *Streets Of Rage* fame, although we found it underwhelming. Rarity costs. Expect to pay £50-£75 for a cart.

Slap Fight is an enjoyable shoot-'em-up with a weird name. And it featured the original giant enemy crabs. Now *that's* a game you must play.

THE CONVERSIONS

How the various versions compare



1 MEGA DRIVE — BEST VERSION

Seven years after its arcade release, *Slap Fight* arrived on the Mega Drive. The port is close to arcade perfect. The only problem is default bullets are too strong, so you'll have to increase the difficulty to compensate. The cart also includes *Slap Fight* MD, an unofficial sequel.



2 COMMODORE 64

Sure, C64 was built for shooters, but Johnny Meegan coded this well. Stephen Wahid's graphics were good and Martin Galway did an excellent version of *Slap Fight*'s challenging soundtrack. The levels were faithful to the original, but your homing missiles were a bit slow.



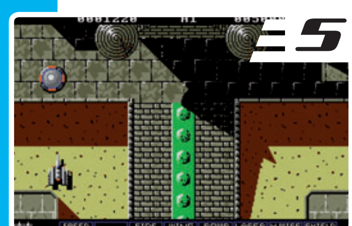
3 ZX SPECTRUM

After the brilliant Mega Drive and Commodore ports, the Spectrum version is disappointing. The lack of in-game music was understandable, but near-invisible bullets are really annoying and the levels are far from accurate. At least it's better than Probe's Amstrad version.



4 AMSTRAD

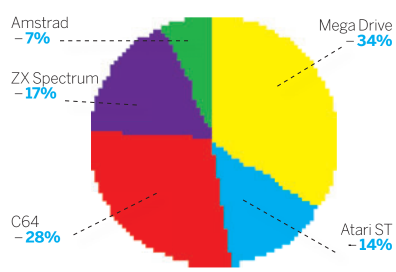
Probe must have been going for some sort of record, as the control panel takes up 44% of the screen. We get the Spectrum's hard-to-see bullets, inaccurate levels, and blocky graphics and the world's smallest bosses. This screenshot's supposed to show the giant three-part tank.



5 ATARI ST — WORST VERSION

The scrolling is far too slow and death sends you a long way back. Levels look fairly accurate, but the enemies appear in the wrong places, shoot too early, and the bullets move too fast. You will die unfairly over and over and over. Forgettable graphics, weak music, no autofire. Evil.

FORUM OPINION



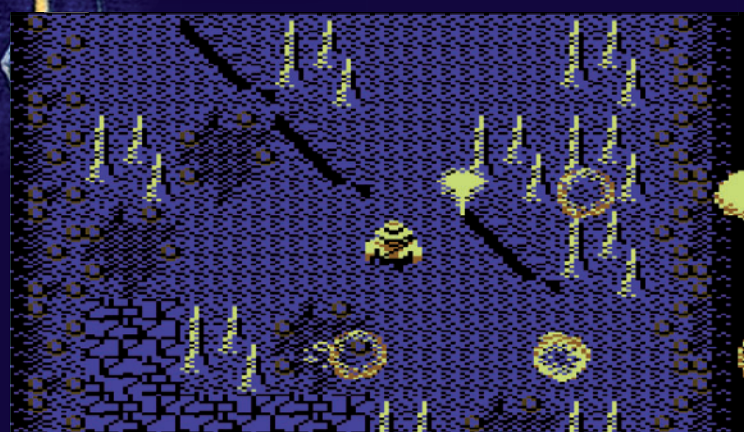
"I have the Mega Drive version and must say that it's awesome. Plus it has music by Yuzo Koshiro"
– GunstarHero

"The C64 version is a solid conversion that does a good job of capturing the feel of the arcade, though it's not nearly as faithful as the MD conversion"
– Emperor Fossil

THE MAKING OF SHOOT-'EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT

The first truly successful consumer-oriented videogame-creation kit, SEUCK went on to spawn an entire cottage industry during the C64's twilight years. Jon Hare reveals to Craig Grannell how Sensible Software's hit utility came to be





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** OUTLAW
- » **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- » **PLATFORM:** C64 (LATER CONVERTED TO THE AMIGA AND ATARI ST)
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP/ GAMES CREATION UTILITY
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



With thick rose-tinted spectacles covering misty, tear-filled eyes, gaming historians often reminisce about a time when every kid with a computer was a bedroom coder, hacking away, trying to create the next chart-topping £1.99 special. But the stark reality is that you always needed a certain way of thinking to truly excel at programming. The 'rest of us' were merely fit to consume, buying games rather than creating them. That is, until *SEUCK* arrived.

Exploding onto the C64 gaming scene in 1987 and acquiring industry awards by the bucketload, Sensible Software's *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* was a revelation. Attempts had previously been made to fashion games-creation software, but with the exception of those for making simple text adventures, none offered an acceptable balance of power, creativity and usability. *SEUCK*'s joystick-oriented, menu-driven approach meant even utterly non-technical C64 owners could rapidly generate sprites, sound effects, game maps and enemy attack patterns.

According to co-creator Jon Hare, *SEUCK* was initially an extension of an in-house tool that partner-in-crime Chris Yates developed for him, somewhat in the tradition of British hobbyist model kits: "We'd already done a bunch of shoot-'em-ups on the C64 and were thinking of doing another a bit like *Galax-i-birds*. Chris wrote something for me to do some game and level design work—putting blocks and stuff down on a map—and it kind of mutated into a utility."

As with the majority of Sensible Software productions, there was no major game plan. "*SEUCK* was very much driven by Chris. It's a programming game, really – a piece of programming," recalls Jon. "We bolted on different sections and I became the guinea pig. Chris would come up with an idea, like doing sprite formations, and I'd use it and offer suggestions about modifying the menus and workflow to make it easier to use."

Jon considers that although it was a challenge to create a product that would give people the ability to do their own thing, Sensible Software was confident that it could create something usable: "Our interface design was



» [C64] Using the 'join enemies' command, foes can be fused, thereby creating large enemies and end-of-level bosses.



» [C64] *SEUCK*'s menu system includes keyboard shortcuts for every action.

always quite good – in other words, our user-friendliness was high, as was our attention to detail in eradicating problems and bugs. And that's important, because when you're creating a construction kit, you're pretty much holding the user's hand throughout the process."

Describing himself as "technically pretty crap", Jon reckons he was the perfect candidate to put himself in the shoes of a potential customer and hone *SEUCK*: "I've always worked around programmers who can bail me out of stuff, but not being that technically knowledgeable is actually a good attribute to have in terms of user-interface design, because if you can use it, anyone can!" *SEUCK* therefore contrasted wildly with many products of the day that were tested in-house, but soon went beyond the skills of the typical consumer. "I'm also the world's worst person for criticising other people's interface design," adds Jon. "I spend my whole life on mobile phones or the internet or watching TV, just screaming at something, wondering who designed it, and 'Why isn't the obvious button bigger?' and 'Why is there such a delay?'. And in videogames in particular, menu design is often overlooked, but that's essentially what *SEUCK* is: a brilliant menu system. The world would be a better place if everyone put as much thought into user-interface design…"

Jon and Chris continued carefully sculpting their new creation: Jon fashioned a quartet of games that would eventually be bundled with the utility and continually suggested redesign and reconfiguration ideas for Chris to implement. In turn, Chris worked up new conceptual ideas for Jon to design with. "It was interesting, because we were maybe a couple of months into it before we realised the utility had became a product," recalls Jon. "We then took it to Palace Software and they liked it… I don't think we were sure it was ever going to get signed up when we started it, and yet it became our most successful product on the C64!"

Eventually, the utility provided editors for sprites, which could be turned into objects and animated in several ways; background characters, which could be fashioned into blocks that were subsequently 'painted' onto a map; sound effects; attack waves, created by selecting an enemy object and 'drawing' its path on a map; character sets, with which you build the front-end title screen; and levels. It also included an option most commercial titles at the time avoided: a co-operative two-player mode. "That came from the arcades," says Jon. "People still talk about things like that as though they're innovative, but to me they're just blindingly obvious. Two-player co-op is such a massively under-used game type on every format, and it's a really fun way to play games. I loved the two-player co-op in *Wizball*, and so we decided it was an important component to add to *SEUCK*."

Although *SEUCK* was a mightily impressive production at the time, the utility nonetheless had some notable omissions: it offered only vertical scrolling, almost no enemy AI, and there were no power-ups – despite them being a common feature in shoot-



» Jon Hare, co-creator of *SEUCK*, was able to use his lack of technical ability to provide valuable feedback on the interface.

» **[C64]** Sequence animations offer up to 18 frames, enabling elaborate movement design.



» [C64] Alf Yngve's excellent *Banana Jones* showcases how cleverly designed *SEUCK* still screens can form simple cut-scenes.



SHOOT-'EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT

Six **SEUCK** games you have to play



COPS

Alf Yngve is a *SEUCK* master, and although *Cops* suffers from sprite flicker, its quality design shines through. The standout moment: a gunfight on a speeding lorry, lamppost-shaped bullets providing an illusion of speed. "Games were about illusion then," says Jon Hare, adding that *Cops* uses *SEUCK*'s "raw ingredients for innovation".



FLY PIG

Shaun Pearson's cartoonish porcine shooter got around *SEUCK*'s lack of horizontal scrolling by suggesting you flip your display 90 degrees. Luckily, CCS64 can do this virtually, without trashing your TV, enabling you to finally play one of the best-looking *SEUCK* games as intended and in all its glory.



TRANSPUTER MAN

One of Jon Hare's original *SEUCK* creations, *Transputer Man* still appeals, due to its great character design, varied sound effects and tough level layouts. The game's quality is such that it probably would have sold nicely on its own merits, and few would have believed it was created using a joystick-based game-creation kit.



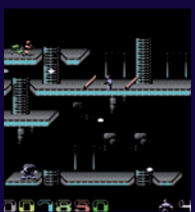
ALIEN TASK FORCE II

Ryan Chenery takes the plot from *Aliens*, the gameplay from *Alien Syndrome*, and mashes the two together into an impressive overhead *SEUCK* effort. The attack waves are particularly well done: although the aliens' paths are canned, you'd sometimes swear they can read your mind.



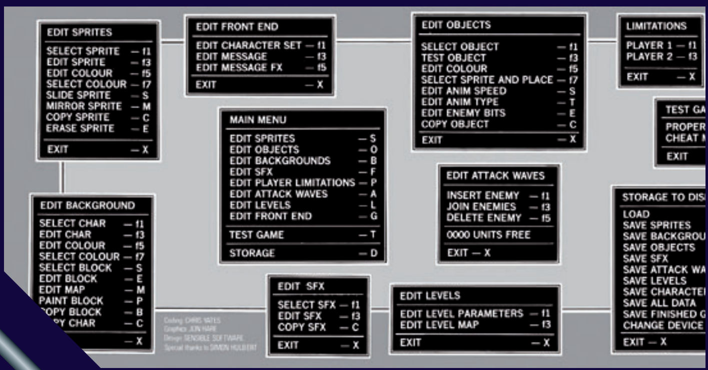
HOUSE CASE

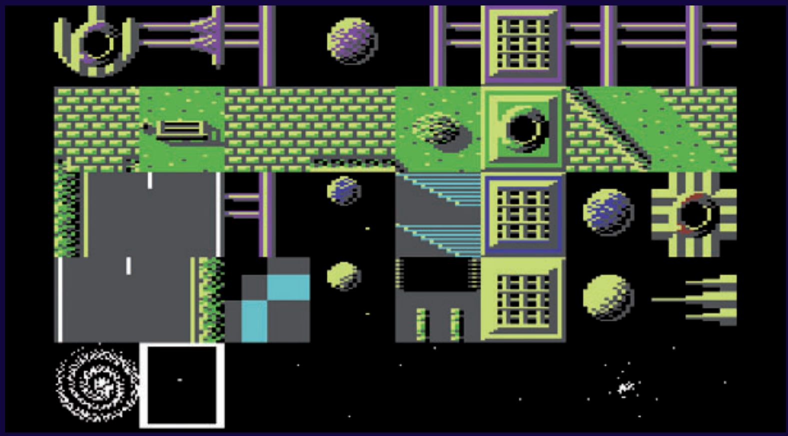
It's not nearly as cute as *Fly Pig*, but Shaun Pearson's gory horror *SEUCK* creation is just as good. Your character's tiny attack range forces you to move carefully and think strategically, and the *Commando* spoof section, complete with zombie desert soldiers moving in authentic *Commando* style, is excellent.



SYNETIC

Frank Gasking's dystopian shooter, finally released in 2000, is an enhanced *SEUCK* creation with a pulsating Jon Wells soundtrack. Although unforgiving, it showcases the versatility of *SEUCK* with its varying gameplay styles, at times aping *Commando*, *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*, *Side Arms* and *Lightforce*.





» [C64] *Slap 'N' Tickle* includes non-standard hi-res map blocks, which you can integrate into your own designs.

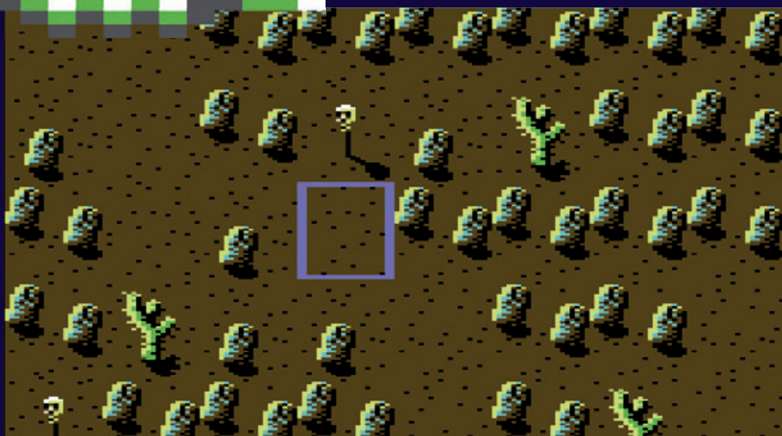
'em-ups at the time. Only one of those things is now something of a regret for Jon: the lack of an option for horizontal scrolling: "We would have liked to have included horizontal scrolling, but the problem is that when you add a major feature like that, you multiply all the features around it. So you've got to amend sprite handling, horizontal and vertical scrolling, how push scrolling works… Where *SEUCK* succeeds is in being very easy to use, but if we'd have added horizontal scrolling, you'd have needed more controls. *SEUCK* would have become much more complex, which we wanted to avoid." (In 2008, Jon Wells somewhat plugged the horizontal *SEUCK* gap with *Sideways SEUCK*, a left-scrolling version of the utility – see **seuck.gamesplaygames.co.uk**.)

Elsewhere, Jon's satisfied with perceived omissions from *SEUCK*. "Some of the most important decisions in game design are what you throw away and what you leave out. It's like music: the gaps are as important as the notes," he affirms. "Our basic thoughts were that people wanted to draw graphics, move sprites around somehow, and control player movement. Instinctively, you know that's simple enough for people to get their heads round – it's all intuitive; you can see everything happening on screen and grasp it in a minute or two. But once you add things like AI, everything becomes really complicated and you're opening a huge can of worms. You have to question whether something like AI is going to benefit the utility once you've added a load of confusing options."

Jon explains that once you 'open the door' to someone to a new world, it's imperative that the world works properly: "With well-designed software, the key thing is that everything you can do should be possible to do thoroughly, covering every combination and option. If it can't work properly, don't open the door." That all said, Jon notes that rudimentary AI-oriented decisions do exist in *SEUCK*, albeit in canned format. "We just didn't open the door too much," he laughs, "and so you get to decide what direction things shoot in, and at what frequency. These are sort of AI elements, but broken

» [C64] Jon Wells created a sideways version of *SEUCK* in 2008.





» [C64] Designing level layouts in *SEUCK* is simply a case of selecting blocks and 'painting' them on the map.

down into basic components that everyone understands."

The editor alone would have probably reviewed well, but, as noted earlier, Jon decided to show off *SEUCK*'s capabilities by creating games that were bundled with the utility: vertically scrolling space shooter *Slap 'N' Tickle*; push-scroller *Outlaw*, a *Gunsmoke* clone that bettered the official C64 conversion; and *Transputer Man*, a *Robotron*-inspired, largely still-screen effort that was set inside a computer. "Automatic scrolling, push-scrolling and static screens were the three main types of games you could do with *SEUCK*, and so we said we'd take three different types of games and three very different environments to show the variety of things you could create," says Jon. A fourth game was subsequently dropped into the mix late on: the uninspiring *Celebrity Squares*, which Jon admits was terrible: "It was pretty much an excuse to get friends' sprites into a game, and it came about because, for whatever reason, we decided on four games at the start, ran out of time, and so created that throwaway effort."

"UK developers were always quite tight in their code, whereas Americans were more sloppy"

However, Jon remains pleased with the other three freebies: "Particularly *Outlaw*, but also the difference in atmosphere between the games and the varied sound effects, all of which show off the versatility of the kit."

Jon adds that *SEUCK* was also a good lesson in code creation and efficiency, with the honed interface matched by streamlined underlying code. "My view is that UK developers were always quite tight in the quality of their code, whereas American developers were more sloppy. With *SEUCK*, we finished the kit and it all worked in one load. Chris was a perfectionist and his code was brilliant – everything worked perfectly," he says. "But when we did the US version, they came back and said there was a problem with the game, in that you couldn't see that the disk drive was being used. We argued that it didn't need to be, but because they were more interested in the hardware being 'used to its fullest' than efficient code, Chris had to hack in some code that 'faked' the drive light coming on, to pretend that *SEUCK* was regularly accessing the disk!"

No such requests arose in the UK, with British publications praising the utility's sleek interface and the lack of a multiload. *SEUCK* duly grabbed itself a *Zzap!* 'Gold Medal' and a *Commodore User* 'Screen Star', but, surprising as it may seem, the utility was the first time a Sensible Software product's critical acclaim was matched by sales. "It was our first number-one game, and we weren't really expecting that," admits Jon. "We were just being inventive. Chris and I were a creative team before all the corporate and business stuff was added on top, and *SEUCK* was a part of that."

Arguably, *SEUCK* has also been Sensible Software's most enduring 8-bit title. Although popular on release, it also extended the life of the C64 via 'upgraded' commercial *SEUCK* games sold via indie developers. And even today, designers work with the utility to create new products, pushing *SEUCK* beyond what anyone thought possible in 1987. "I'm really sad about Commodore generally, because it was such a good company for Sensible Software – both because of the C64 and the Amiga – and so I'm glad we could have contributed anything that prolonged the life of one of its systems," says Jon.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WIZBALL
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1987

SENSIBLE SOCCER
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

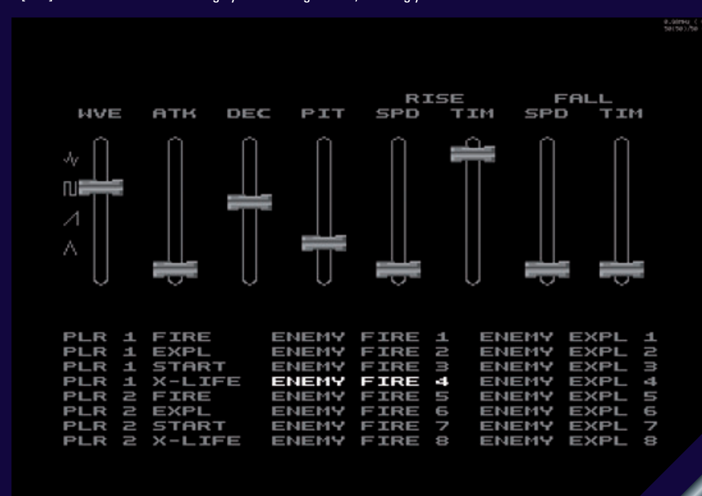
CANNON FODDER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1993



» [C64] Various elements of your player can be edited in *SEUCK*.



» [C64] *SEUCK*'s sound editor is hugely entertaining in itself, enabling you to stretch the SID to its limits.



CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



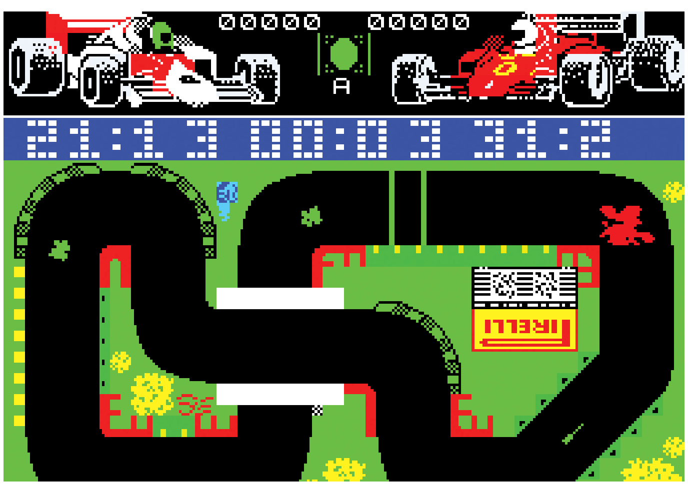
If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR

- **SYSTEM:** AMSTRAD CPC
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **DEVELOPER:** THE OLIVER TWINS



» [ZX Spectrum] The only downside to the Spectrum version is that it's really hard to tell which car is which.



Codemasters often included the word 'simulator' in its early titles. It seldom mattered that there was often a poor correlation between what was happening on screen and what tended to occur in real life. As former boss David Darling once told us, "Simulators appeared to sell ten times better because they were recognisable. You knew what you were getting with Grand Prix Simulator."

In some ways, what you thought you were getting and what you got was very different. Consider that the real-life Grand Prix has always been a major event – a cacophony of sound welded with the sight of speeding cars and the smell of burning rubber – and who could fail to look bemused as *Grand Prix Simulator* pitted two control-sensitive boxes against each other with the ultimate achievement of keeping them moving as quickly as possible and in as straight a line as you could manage? And with plinky blipping noises to boot (on CPC anyway – it sounded great on a C64), an authentic sim it was not.

Yet when this top-down racer from the Olivers debuted on Amstrad CPC over 23 years ago, it flew the flag for such games – even if it was similar to the Darlings' *BMX Simulator*. Available for just £1.99, it drove more than a few gamers wild and thrilled those who had previously played *Super Sprint*. It's even been said that Electric Dreams attempted to sue Codemasters over the similarities between the games, a lawsuit prompted by the popularity of GPS that was subsequently thrown out.



» [Amstrad] The grey car gets stuck in a ditch, leaving orange to potentially take the lead.

Winning a race was a true test of driving prowess – you had to deal with a lot of skids and spins and very narrow bits of road during your three-lap course.

The races grew increasingly difficult and the opponent became evermore challenging as you made your way through the 14 tracks, holding your breath as you went under a bridge hoping you hadn't wasted valuable seconds bashing into the sides or getting lost in the darkness. Power sliding was thrilling and the oil slicks made you scream as you hurtled into the barriers where you got stuck and had to watch in horror as the rival car flew into the lead. Picking up a points bonus was also exciting.

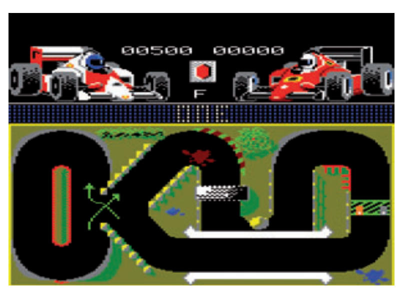
In two-player, each of you had to beat the computer-controlled car to qualify, making for some additionally compelling competitive bouts. And while the cars themselves were little squares, the well-drawn F1 motors sitting next to the scores, and the colourful tracks made up for it.

Thrilling us CPC owners back in the day was not only the pleasant title music, but also the speech synthesis, which was hard to make out at times but still got us off to a great start with "Three. Two. One. Go." Although speech was used in the Olivers' previous two releases, *Super Robin Hood* and *Ghost Hunters*, this didn't have the same wow-factor. Still it was a neat touch.

While some prefer the sequel, *Grand Prix Simulator* was nowhere near the pits. And you can pick it up for mere pennies today, which is definitely driving a bargain.



» [C64] The Oliver twins didn't work on the C64 version, leaving porting duties to Adrian Sheppard.



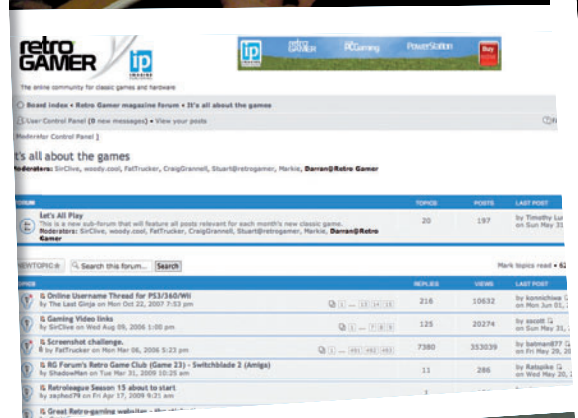
» [Amstrad] The cool F1 vehicles rendered next to the scores made up for the blocky cars racing round the tracks in game.

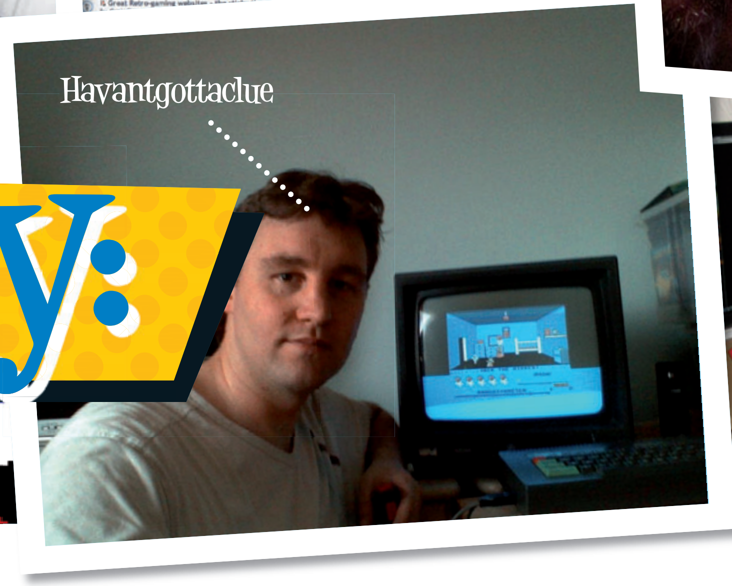
This month we all played **Jack The Nipper** – a memorable game starring a boisterous little romper-suited poop machine from Gremlin Graphics, who just loved raising hell on those 8-bit micros













let's all play: Jack The Nipper





Information

Publisher: Gremlin Graphics
Developer: in-House
First Released: 1986
Featured System: Spectrum

Those First Impressions

Stuart I remember being blown away by the look of *Jack The Nipper* as a kid. I was an avid comic book reader and devoured the pages of *The Beano*, *Dandy* and *Viz* (cheers, dad), so I loved the chunky visuals, slick presentation, comic humour and open-world feel of the game. Returning to it now, I'm happy to report that the game still looks brilliant. Sure, it can be a little fiddly and unfairly punishing at times, but how many games let you cause chaos under the guise of a naughty, hyperactive toddler?

paranoid marvin On replay, it's a lot harder than I remember. I still love the graphics. The characters look familiar, especially the mother and father, but I can't remember which cartoon/comic they remind me of. It was very different from many platformer and shooters of the time, and allowed for experimentation, something not seen in too many games at that time.

STranger81 As a six year old, it was my first taste of an open-world game. Until then, the games I'd experienced simply involved getting from A to B on a set path, and I was just in awe of the fact you could choose your own route through the game and do whatever you wanted.

Dizrythmia I thought he was more like Sweeny Toddler from *Whoopee*, and later *Whizzer And Chips*, and after that *Buster*. A lot of the artwork in the game was very Sweeny as well. I thought it was the best game ever at the time, and it's still great after all these years. I first played it on a friend's C64 and had to find out if it was available for the Amstrad. Sure enough it was, so I tracked down a copy on disc and had fun for many months before my copy went missing. I never did find it again, but I did come across another copy on tape and tolerated the slow loading times. I loved the game that much.

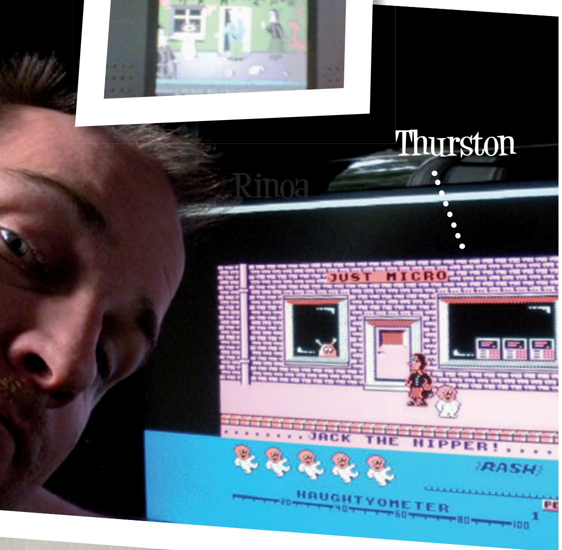
Darran One of the things I love most about *Jack The Nipper* is its Britishness. It really seems to encapsulate the Eighties. I'm also quite partial to how Jack himself seems to have stepped out of pages of *The Beano*.

Ferret Oxide There's a certain kind of charm to Jack's antics that is missing in many games. It really rewards experimentation and is far from linear. When so many games had specific goals and solutions, Jack allowed you to just get on and play.

Zagrebo In common with what a lot of other people have said, I remember liking the fact that you essentially had a small town in which to mess around as you pleased, with no specific route to completing the game. Looking back now, it was an early example of a sandbox game, in which the player was allowed to do their own thing, rather than follow a strict path that the designer had set out for them.

Sputryk I cannot deny that the game looks good: clearly defined graphics and an uncluttered screen. However, for me at least, the look is deceiving. I got horribly annoyed and rather bored flicking from screen to screen trying out different items, and the choice of non-definable keys didn't help matters. Although other characters appear to







★ Go deeper: trivia trail

» If you leave the title screen running, Herbert appears to cheekily hurry you on your way. The little scamp.

» *Jack The Nipper 2: In Coconut Capers*, found our pint-sized antihero in a colossal 192-screen adventure set in a jungle.

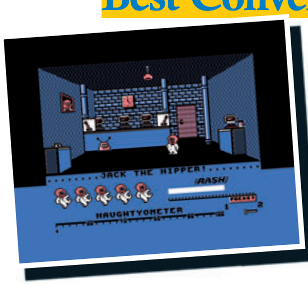
» The game was actually based upon a comic strip that ran inside the pages of *Your Sinclair* magazine.

» *Jack The Nipper* contains 14 pranks (and other various items) divided up across an impressive 50 screens.

move on pre-defined paths, they sometimes bunch together making it painful getting out of the way.

andrew_rollings *Jack The Nipper* was special because I heard about it from my school friends before I actually saw the game – or the iconic *Crash* cover of the issue that featured it. I distinctly remember thinking they were winding me up from their – as it turned out, accurate – description of the game, and I remember poring longingly over the *Crash* review until I could get my hands on a copy of the game. It was everything I expected and more… a live-action *Beano* comic strip. It's a shame *Jack The Nipper II* was so pants – a substandard *Wally* clone.

Best Conversion



Darran Without wanting to sound like I'm favouring the CPC here just because I owned one once, the Amstrad conversion is the best when compared with its peers. It's surprisingly smooth and the visuals are wonderfully detailed. This version is the one I pumped the most hours into in my youth, and having spent a fair amount of time playing catch-up on the Spectrum and C64 ports, while they certainly have their merits, the CPC port remains the best overall conversion of the game in my honest opinion.

Havantgottaclue This C64 fanboy has to admit that the CPC version looks the best. There may only be four colours on screen at any one time, but it's surprising what little difference this makes once you get used to it. The better definition on the characters, compared to the C64 version, is worth the loss of some colour. At least with the CPC you can clearly see what you're picking up, unlike the blocky multicoloured sprites used for the C64 version – you can barely make out what some of the objects are. The CPC version runs a little slower than the C64 version, but in many ways that's a bit of a relief. Speed isn't really an issue with this game.

Rinoa I've been playing the C64 version, but seeing as I couldn't find a working copy for the MSX or Spectrum, I have no way of comparing.

Shinobi I've only ever played the C64 version. I got it for Christmas with my Commodore 64 in 1989, but I remember it looking really nice, as I only owned the Plus 4. It was probably one of my favourite games back then, but I never completed it. I remember reaching some haunted house or something with ghosts.

Favourite Shop

Stuart The first rule of naughty and/or mentally unstable kids is never let them loose in shops or zoos. Most will act like red squirrels after a Red Bull and E-number binge. For entertainment value, the makers of *Jack The Nipper* lined its virtual streets with plenty of shops for the creation of havoc. My favourite, however, has to be the Just Micro store, for no reason other than that the store reminded me of my local computer game store – the Micro Centre in Portsmouth if anyone knows of it. I used to frequent it quite a bit as a nipper.

Zagrebo Gummo's Chomping Molars! What's going on with that place? A conveyor belt of snapping dentures?

Ferret Oxide Hummo's, because every town should have a sock factory.

paranoid marvin One very naughty child inside a China Shoppe. There's gonna be trouble!

Best Prank

Stuart To finish *Jack The Nipper* the player must help the titular tearaway fill up his Naughtyometer. To achieve this you must pull various object-based pranks in the game. Looking back, I always enjoyed giving cats the horn and waving the battery around the plug socket to blow all of the computers inside Just Micro. My favourite prank in the game has to be freeing the prisoners from jail. It's by far the most elaborate and complex act of tomfoolery in the game. You can't get more dastardly than springing hardened criminals from jail – that's a whole new level of anarchy.



felgekarp The meeting that occurs between one slumbering cat and one rather loud horn.

Zagrebo I like the cat and horn prank, too, but have to mention killing off the old boy's flowers with the weed killer. Love the way the screen flashes and then all the flowers die, so dramatic.

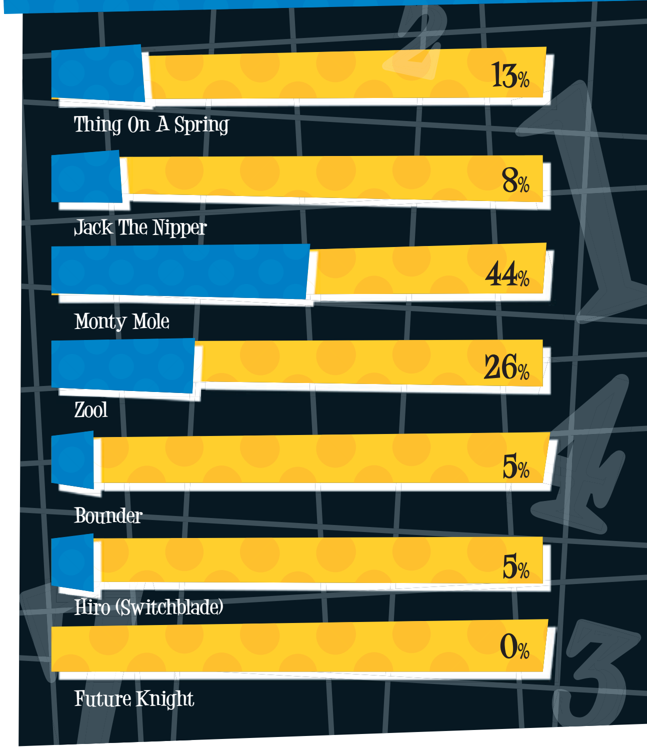
Dizrythmia Not really a prank, but the old faithful peashooter did add to the Naughtyometer so I guess it counts. Watching that slow-moving pea move across the screen, sitting there for that second or two, hoping whoever you were aiming for didn't move out of the way. Brilliant.

Shinobi Gluing the false teeth together or putting dye in the washing machines. I liked how everyone went purple with rage after you did it.

Ferret Oxide I like the fact that using Jack's parents' credit card causes the ATM to crash. It just seems like such a random reaction.

Forum Poll

This month: **Best Gremlin Graphics Character**



let's all play: Jack The Nipper



What Makes It A Classic

Stuart Sure, you could argue that the game is a frustrating endeavour at times, especially after completing a prank and seeing the narked shop owner home in on you like a Tomahawk missile and give you severe nappy rash, but in terms of graphics, *Jack The Nipper* was head and shoulders above its peers. Feeling like a three-dimensional take on a *Wally Week* game, it dazzled with its detailed graphics, foot-tapping music and variety of puzzles and locations. That Gremlin spent so much time making the game look the business, I can't help but feel that more thought should have been spent refining the overall gameplay. Back then, however, I would shallowly overlook shoddy framework for fancy graphics and bad humour?



jdanddiet I think that originality is the key here. In an era of countless shoot-'em-ups, *Jack The Nipper* presented some fairly revolutionary puzzles and settings. Is it a classic? I'm not so sure. It still looks okay today, but I wouldn't say it's that good. Put it this way, I don't think it would make my top 30 Speccy games.

khisanth For me it's the appeal of being naughty and getting away with it. The cheeky look on Jack's face as he crawls around the screen always puts a smile on my face.

Stack It's not exactly a classic, but it might be with just a touch more Benny Hill chases and more dramatic mayhem. The slapstick is definitely what keeps it fresh and worth giving a try, but it just isn't funny enough to earn classic status. When startled, the cats float rather than spring up to the ceiling, which is surely just wrong. The map is also flawed. The technique of stretching the game out by making you divert round in map-defying circles is overused. Still, it's a shame that so few games even attempt comedy. *Jack The Nipper* is still a winner and has a timeless charm,

Dizrythmia When you think 'computer game' something like *Jack The Nipper* doesn't even enter your mind. What makes is a classic is that it breaks the mould of the traditional computer game. Someone at Gremlin Graphics wasn't frightened to try something new… and it paid off. It seems that we all learn from our past mistakes, but never our past successes.

paranoid marvin The puzzles have obvious solutions – but only when you're in a naughty frame of mind – and the consequences are so much more satisfying than other arcade adventures of this type. Smashing valuable plates in a china shop, gluing false teeth together, and blowing up the computers only to have infuriated adults chasing you round the shop afterwards is hilarious. Like Jack himself says, buy this game… or else.

Darran It just felt so refreshingly different to virtually every other game that I was playing at the time. I'm unsure if *The Beano* was any sort of inspiration to the developers, but there's an underlying similarity that's impossible to ignore. The actual freedom you had still manages to impress as well, and in many ways it adopts an almost sandbox approach where you simply decide what task to tackle next. Being bad has never been so good.

Classic game? You must be joking

Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…

"I'm getting very frustrated very quickly" – the_hawk

"Well, I tried to like it, but I just… well, don't. The graphics are lovely and the puzzles are clever and interesting without being too obscure, but I just hate traversing Jack's little world" – nokgod

"The graphics are great and the puzzles are fun to work out, but the controls are terrible" – ninjabearhug



» (C64) While this version has plenty of colour, some of the sprites look a little blocky and the speed of the game is a tad too skittish for our liking.

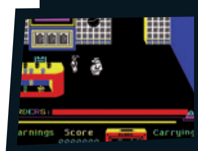


Further play

Similar titles you may want to try

Supersleuth

FEATURED SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR RELEASED: 1985



Released a year before *Jack The Nipper*, Gremlin's *Supersleuth* saw paunchy store detective Grumpy Gumphrey going about his job while pandering to his dictatorial, tea-swilling boss. Easier to pick up than *Jack The Nipper*, but not quite as good in the looks department.

Herbert's Dummy Run

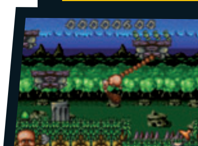
FEATURED SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR RELEASED: 1985



A reworking of the *Pyjamarama* code, *Herbert's Dummy Run* was the first and only *Wally Week* spin-off to be released by Mikro-Gen. It found Wally's son Herbert lost inside a mall teeming with dangers and solving puzzles in the hopes of being reunited with his parents.

Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck

FEATURED SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993



Tired of *Jack The Nipper*'s random puzzles? Then why not try Core's excellent follow-up to *Chuck Rock*. Dropped was the lumbering caveman Chuck, and in his place stood his club-wielding son Chuck Junior. With platforming action that feels nippier, and with graphics crisper than those of the original, this is a solid sequel.

Viz

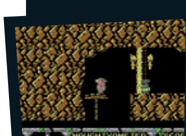
FEATURED SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR RELEASED: 1991



For a game with humour akin to *Jack The Nipper*, you could try *Viz* . Three characters from the pages of the comic book – Johnny Fartpants, Biffa Bacon and Buster Gonad – compete in a series of sports-day-style events. Shallower than Pin Head's paddling pool, but fun in short bursts.

Jack The Nipper II: In Coconut Capers

FEATURED SYSTEM: C64
YEAR RELEASED: 1987



Coconut Capers proved another rip-roaring success for Jack and Gremlin. Boasting improved graphics, more characters, and a much bigger world (almost 200 screens), the sequel tweaked at the original's gameplay a little to make it more platformy, and annoyingly removed the Rash meter for one-hit kills.

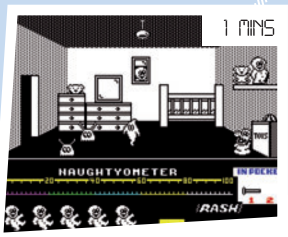
Moments in Time

The best pranks from Jack The Nipper and when they appear…

1 Easy Peasy

Right, getting the peashooter is your first undertaking. Thankfully it's easier than swiping candy from a baby. After starting the game, jump on top of the chest of drawers, hop over to Jack's cot, and there it will be, sitting on the shelf waiting to be abused. Firing it at people adds to Jack's Naughtyometer. However, it also makes him pretty unpopular, so be careful.





2 Kill Switch

After picking up the battery from the police station, enter the Just Micro store and wave it in front of the plug socket. This causes the electrics to blow and the computers to red ring. Watch out for the shop owner – once you close down his business and ruin his life he chases you around the store in an attempt to give you a good hiding.

3 Cat Launcher

Startling the sleeping moggy is one of the best pranks in the game, but finding the horn to accomplish this task takes some doing. First, pick up the key from the garden and then make your way to the museum. Walk through the gap in the wall, behind the radiator, and you'll appear inside a random house. Inside you'll find the horn and one dozing cat.





4 Crash Machine

Even Jack's parents aren't safe from the toothy tearaway as he steals his dad's cash card, which has been prudently stashed aloft a seemingly unreachable wardrobe, and uses it to crash a cash machine. Jack obtains the credit card by stepping through another gap in a wall, this time behind the radiator in the bank.

5 Prison Break

The prison break is the hardest prank to pull off in the game and it sees Jack traipsing all over the game map to get the objects needed to accomplish his mission. Starting off in the garden to find the key, Jack has to negotiate a perilous dash through a haunted house, via a screen warp inside the museum, to acquire the cartoon bomb that is needed to spring the prisoners from jail.



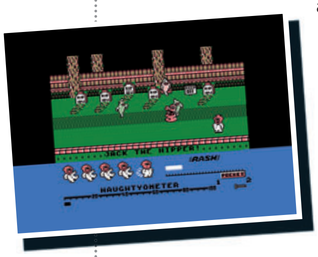
Rinoa I can certainly see the appeal of this game as it's different and puts you in the role of the bad guy, but I wouldn't go as far as saying it's a classic. Maybe it's because I never had the chance to play it back in the day, or perhaps the deciding factor was down to the controls being a massive disappointment. Either way, it won't be a game I'll be reminiscing over too much in 20 years' time.

Stack I generally dislike games from this collect/use genre and have given Jack a wide berth before, but as it turns out *Jack The Nipper* is very charming. I'm cheating, though. Back in the day I would have wandered around forever getting nowhere. Now, with the WOS map and the odd squint at the Tipshop walkthrough I'm having fun with it. I even worked out one prank unaided. I'm playing the Spectrum version and the monochrome graphics suits the game's *Beano* look admirably. Normally I prefer a bit of colour clash, but in this game the cartoon strip feel is near perfect.

jdanddiet I've finally given the Speccy version a go via emulator. First impressions are that it is a really tough game, but I remember having great fun playing it back in the day. I think it's because I was never that interested in trying to complete it; I just liked discovering new locations.

Best Location

Stuart One of the best elements of *Jack The Nipper* is the large playground of destruction Jack is given access to. Impressively, you could enter all of the shops and buildings that are found in the game – something even the mighty *Grand Theft Auto* has yet to offer its players. Despite plenty going on inside the various shops and stores, there was still much to explore outdoors. My favourite locale has to be the allotments and neighbouring cemetery, although you don't want to spend too long in the latter… even the dead are aware of Jack's notoriety.



Stack The laundrette and the graveyard locations are both quite nicely put together.

Zagrebo I quite like the haunted house that you reach if you can get past the annoying purple room behind the museum radiator. I've just realised that the above sounds like something out of a David Lynch movie.

Ferret Oxide I actually like the secret room in the museum. I think that having what is essentially a platform mini-game in the middle of the adventure makes for a pleasant change of pace and really shows how experimental this game could be. It's just a shame the room can be so frustrating.

paranoid marvin Jack's house, a walking dog, stupid-looking parents and an evil baby… it's like a scene straight out of *Family Guy*. Hang about, maybe that's where Fox got the idea from.

Rinoa The museum. There's something quite satisfying about picking up and smashing what could only be antique vases… then having the security bloke turn a fine shade of purple and chase after you.

STranger81 Just Micro. Computers… In a computer game. Quality.



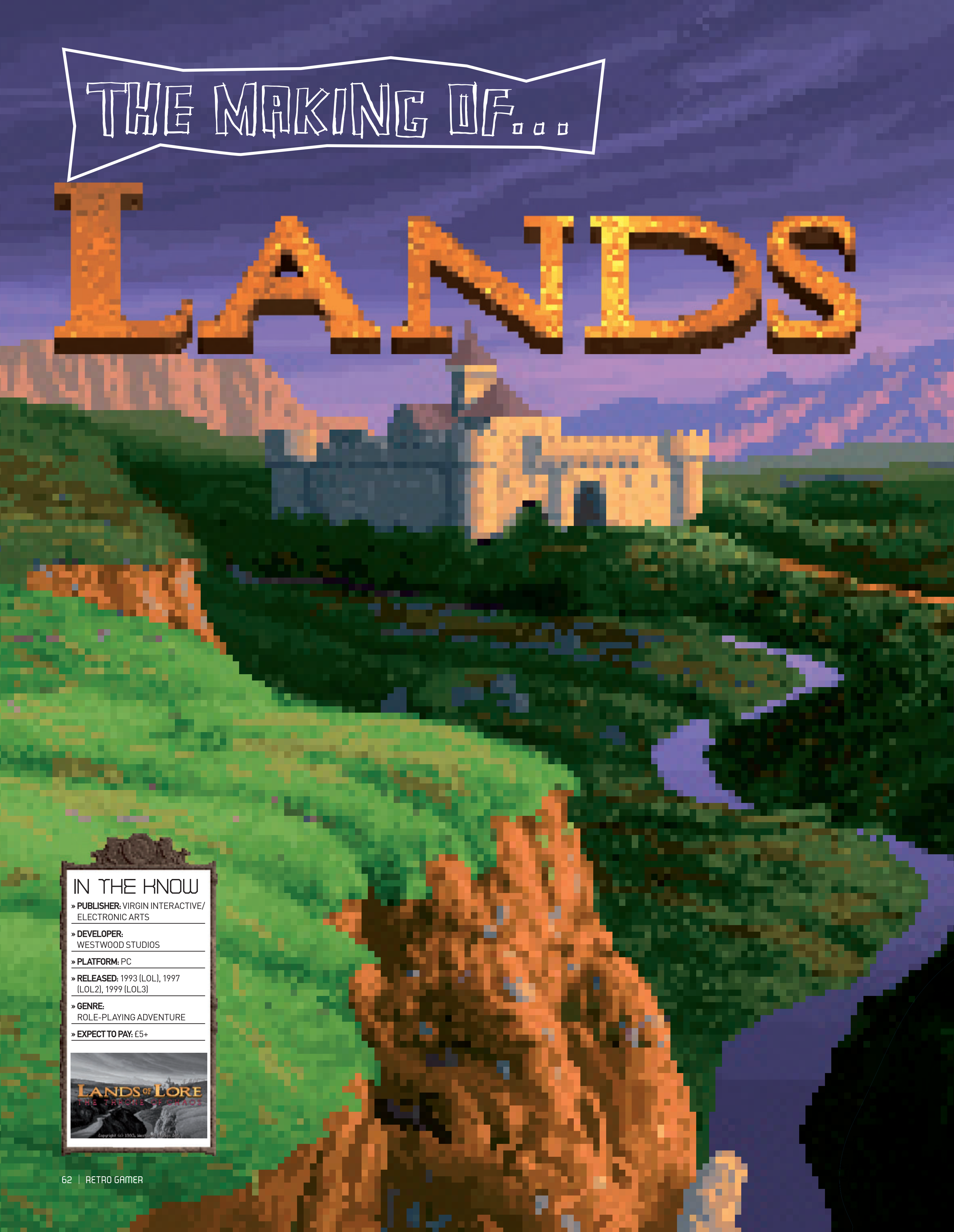
» [C64] No British game set in a town would be complete without its very own laundrette manned by a woman who looks like Dot Cotton.

Next Month's Game



Moonwalker

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.



THE MAKING OF...

LANDS

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE/ ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** WESTWOOD STUDIOS

» **PLATFORM:** PC

» **RELEASED:** 1993 (LOL), 1997 (LOL2), 1999 (LOL3)

» **GENRE:** ROLE-PLAYING ADVENTURE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



Of Lore

Before it became known as the world's premier RTS creator, Westwood Studios was primarily concerned with pointy-eared elves and cantankerous witches. Join Damien McFerran as he equips his +1 leather codpiece and charts a course for Gladstone Castle

The now-defunct Westwood Studios is probably best known for producing the insanely popular Command & Conquer series, but the fact the company was also one of the leading lights in the realm of adventure games is often overlooked. Back in the early-Nineties, the Las Vegas-based developer produced a series of role-playing titles for SSI under the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons banner.

After achieving considerable success with two superb *Eye Of The Beholder* games, Westwood was acquired by Virgin Interactive. The risky decision was made to shed the lucrative but ultimately restrictive *AD&D* licence and focus on creating a fresh property. "I'm sure this decision was made by Brett Sperry and Louis Castle," says Rick Gush, who worked as a producer on the *Lands Of Lore* series and was also responsible for the storyline. He continues: "Brett was particularly aware of the benefits of creating a series of brands and I think creating their own new brand was the best move towards both promotion and self-determination for the studio." As Joseph Hewitt, who worked as an artist at Westwood during this time, explains: "Now that we were a publisher, we wanted to develop our own properties rather than work on games for another publisher to make money out of."

With two entries in the critically acclaimed *Eye Of The Beholder* series under its belt, Westwood had both the game engine and the experience to attempt such a feat, but creating an entire fantasy universe from scratch wasn't going to be an easy task. Thankfully the studio was home to some supremely talented individuals and work soon began in earnest. "I think Phil Gorrow was the first to propose *Lands Of Lore* design ideas," recalls Gush, who didn't join the company until after production had commenced. "Gorrow and his crew had the basic concepts in place. Although the game was his baby, I think Phil was happy to let someone else continue with the story and game map in order that he could concentrate on the new engine. A few months after I arrived, we hired Bill Crum, who was a friend of Phil's. Bill became the official designer and I took the title of producer. I really enjoyed working with Phil and then Bill on the broad design, but then they did all the dirty work of actually making sure the game worked."

Westwood had a fairly grand scheme in mind for its new franchise and the intention was clearly to better *Eye Of The Beholder 2* in every regard. "It was basically about evolving the game, increasing the depth of story, pushing game concepts and trying to make another really fun title, only this time with all our own rules," explains Hewitt. Another key concern was making the game as accessible as possible to ensure it could reach the widest audience. "Brett was big on making the game more user-friendly," he continues. "The *AD&D* licence came with a lot of rules, restrictions and built-in assumptions of what you had to have. *AD&D* was a great pencil-and-paper game, but a lot of the way it was developed had to do with the fact it *was* a pencil-and-paper game."

After toiling away on so many *AD&D* games, the Westwood team were aware of how limiting the ruleset could be and how it could negatively affect game design. "There were so many things that snagged the design where we had to do odd things. We were pushing square pegs into round holes to make a fun computer game," elaborates Hewitt. "For example, how realistic was it to be camping in the hallway of the dungeon for weeks while everybody healed up and re-memorised spells? In a tabletop game you were role-playing the whole thing out over pizza and soda with a group of friends – *AD&D* was balanced

In Memory Of Rick Parks



Though fans may have been disappointed that Westwood used traditional 2D graphics for the first game in the series, they were of such high quality that it was hailed a masterpiece regardless. This standard of graphical brilliance was down to lead artist Rick Parks, who passed away in 1996. "Rick was the aesthetic soul of Westwood," says Gush. "We were all a bit in awe of his artistic capacities, but he was just one of the guys and really enjoyed participating in all the office hilarity. Although I was not a close friend of his, Rick's passing hit me hard, and I was motivated to make some major changes in my own life." Hewitt also recalls Parks with great affection. "We liked to pick on Rick and call him the 'centre of the universe'," he says. "He was one of the greatest people I've ever had the pleasure to meet, let alone work with and learn from. We pushed ourselves harder to just try and be as good as he was."

LANDS OF LORE SERIES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

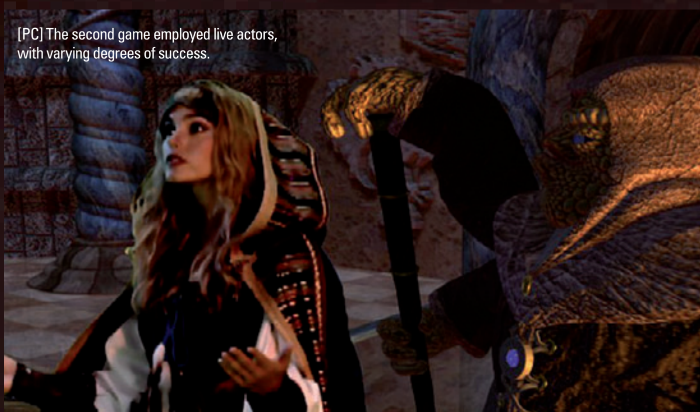
COMMAND & CONQUER
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

LEGEND OF KYRANDIA
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1992



and designed around that. Experience progression was a really big pain with the *AD&D* system. We had to hide places in the game where we could secretly give you experience points for just walking over a spot on the map to make sure you kept up with the progression curve. Again, what you get from role-playing with friends is very different than what you want from a computer game."

The desire to do things differently affected every aspect of the game design, including the in-game characterisation. "One of the major things that got on Brett's nerves was character creation," says Hewitt. "With *AD&D* you had to spend all that time creating a character with all these stats whose effect in the game you hadn't yet been taught. Imagine someone who'd never played *AD&D* suddenly getting tossed all those things along with some esoteric dice-rolling number system. They'd be lost and afraid of creating a gimped character that wouldn't be capable of completing the game and wouldn't be fun. Brett has us put in simple character creation: you picked one of four pre-made characters and that was it."



[PC] The second game employed live actors, with varying degrees of success.

Things progressed well and the Westwood team were aware they were creating something special. However, during development an event occurred that radically altered the playing field in the first-person RPG arena: Origin released *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. It was the first title to utilise true 3D graphics and essentially made the old-fashion flick-screen adventures – such as *Eye Of The Beholder* and *Dungeon Master* – look basic in comparison. However, Westwood was too far into development to retool the 2D *Lands Of Lore* engine. "By the time *Ultima Underworld* and the early FPS games started to come out we had to address the fact that the single step 'fake' 3D world tech was dated," says Hewitt. "But we also knew what it would mean to try and create new technology. That's why we stayed with the 2D engine but put a lot of effort into polishing it up as much as possible. The 'blurred step and turn' was introduced to give the game that smooth 3D feel."

One area in which *Lands Of Lore* was unquestionably innovative was its use of CD-ROM technology. It was one of the first Westwood games to utilise the shiny plastic disc that went on to revolutionise the industry. However, the storage space offered by this exciting new medium was only used to contain speech, some of which was supplied by thespian and part-time USS Enterprise captain Patrick Stewart. "This was at a time in the industry when CDs were still the up-and-coming new thing," recalls Hewitt. "Releasing CD versions that added little beyond speech was common. But that was the industry taking the time to learn and develop tools for it and figure it out."

Stewart was a consummate professional during his brief time with the Westwood team. "At the recording in Hollywood I remember that we were really impressed with how professional Patrick was," recalls Gush. "We had spent $30,000 for three hours of his time, so we were worried about all the inevitable delays at the studio, but in the end he finished everything with time to spare. As the writer of the dialogue, I was concerned that the context of the lines would not always be clear, but once he started reading, it was obvious that he'd give us some wonderful stuff." Working with such a famous actor had other, somewhat unexpected benefits. "We got a cardboard cutout of him dressed in his *Star Trek* uniform out of the deal," chuckles Hewitt. "For years it was common to be walking through the halls of Westwood to find him peering out from behind the snack machine, hanging upside down from an air-conditioner vent or even sitting at your desk."

Upon its release in 1993 the game was met with critical and commercial acclaim. It was inevitable that a sequel would be put into production. *Lands Of Lore 2: Guardians Of Destiny* boldly took the series into the realm of 3D graphics, but it wasn't an entirely smooth ride. "Moving from 2D to 3D was a bloody, hard-fought process," comments Gush. "Rick Parks had some experience with Lightwave, but none of the other



Begone, Foul Bug

No game is perfect, and *Lands Of Lore* is no exception. It contains a game-breaking bug that doesn't become apparent until the player is tantalisingly near to the end of the game. "There's a scene where one of the female characters shows up and asks for her key back," explains Hewitt. "It's really the main antagonist Scotia in disguise, but it's pretty obvious if I remember correctly. You refuse and she drops her shape-shift disguise and you have to fight a lizard or something while she flies off. Unfortunately, if you happened to fall for Scotia's trick and gave her the key, you never got it back. It was supposed to be in a room in the final level, but somehow we all missed it and never tested that. We got a letter from some guy who had lost his key and we had to have him mail us a floppy with his save game so we could edit it to give him the key so he could finish the game."





[PC] The sumptuous 2D artwork of the first *Lands Of Lore* still looks amazing today.



[PC] *Lands Of Lore's* protagonist, Luther, meets the Draracle, a character whose presence is felt in all three titles.



Rick Gush: has spade, will travel.



[PC] The third game was released just as 3D graphics cards were starting to take hold, but still looked pretty rough when compared to the 2D beauty of the first title.

> **"I still get regular fan mail from folks wanting to talk about the game"** RICK GUSH

artists did at that early point. I'm not very good at screaming at people and giving ultimatums, but Brett forced me to be very hard with the artists as they moved towards mastering 3DStudio." The production of the second game wasn't helped by the fact that Westwood had another project in the pipeline, which was sucking away resources and attention from the *Lands Of Lore* sequel. "The whole unspoken purpose of the *Lands Of Lore* series by this time was to keep product in the Virgin pipeline while Brett worked on his masterpiece, which was the next evolution of he and Joe Bostic's real-time strategy ideas," explains Gush. "We cut corners all over the place and produced the game not as an independent piece of art, but more to the timetable that would best help keep the pressure off the as-yet-unnamed *Command & Conquer*, which had been in a sort of pre-development for several years." Despite the rough nature of the 3D visuals and the hurried development schedule, Gush is happy with what was achieved with the second game. "I still get regular fan mail from folks wanting to talk about the game. In general, even with the visual problems, lots of people seem to like the second in the series best. I know for me it was by far the most fun one to make."

The genesis of the third – and so far, final – *Lands Of Lore* instalment was even more painful. Ironically, this was down to Westwood's newfound success thanks to a certain RTS game. "I'm happy to have survived the corporate idiocy that descended on Westwood after *Command & Conquer* was such a hit," says Gush with a wry smile. "I think Westwood grossed something like $120 million in 1998. At the time we had 105 employees in the new office complex and we were swamped with orders and counter-orders from various LA-based prima donnas, marketing producers and vice presidents." This corporate upheaval had a de-stabilising effect on the already beleaguered *Lands Of Lore* team. "By the time we were about three quarters done with the game, we all knew in our hearts that *Lands Of Lore* was finished," laments Gush. "The third game's development limped to a conclusion, somewhat like the effort of a gritty football team that was being beaten by a much better team – the better team, in this case, was *Command & Conquer*. We did a good workmanlike job, but I don't think anybody thought that working on the game was the crowning glory of their career and the whole thing was so tainted with erratic and imperious executive directives that nobody felt extremely personal or possessive about the game. The later official notification of the cancellation of the series, after Westwood had been purchased by EA, didn't really surprise anyone. I left Westwood not long after *Lands of Lore 3* was finished."

It is rumoured that the series was imagined as an eight-part story, but it looks as if we'll never see the other five chapters. "We did fiddle around with a few ideas for a fourth game after the third was published, but mostly just for something to do while the studio politics were resolved," admits Gush. "Not only is there no chance EA will continue *Lands Of Lore*, they aren't interested in co-operating or communicating with the several fan developing groups in Europe that are slowly trying to produce a new episode. *Lands Of Lore* just doesn't fit in EA's line-up any more."

PSSST

WHISPER IT… IT'S GOOD



- **PUBLISHER:** ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **GENRE:** ARCADE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2.50 (ROM CARTRIDGE RECENTLY FETCHED £50)



HISTORY

Back in 1983, Ultimate released Pssst, Chris and Tim Stamper's gaming follow-up that rode hot on the heels of instant classic Jetpac. Neither game had been unveiled to much fanfare, but quietly they began to grow on people.

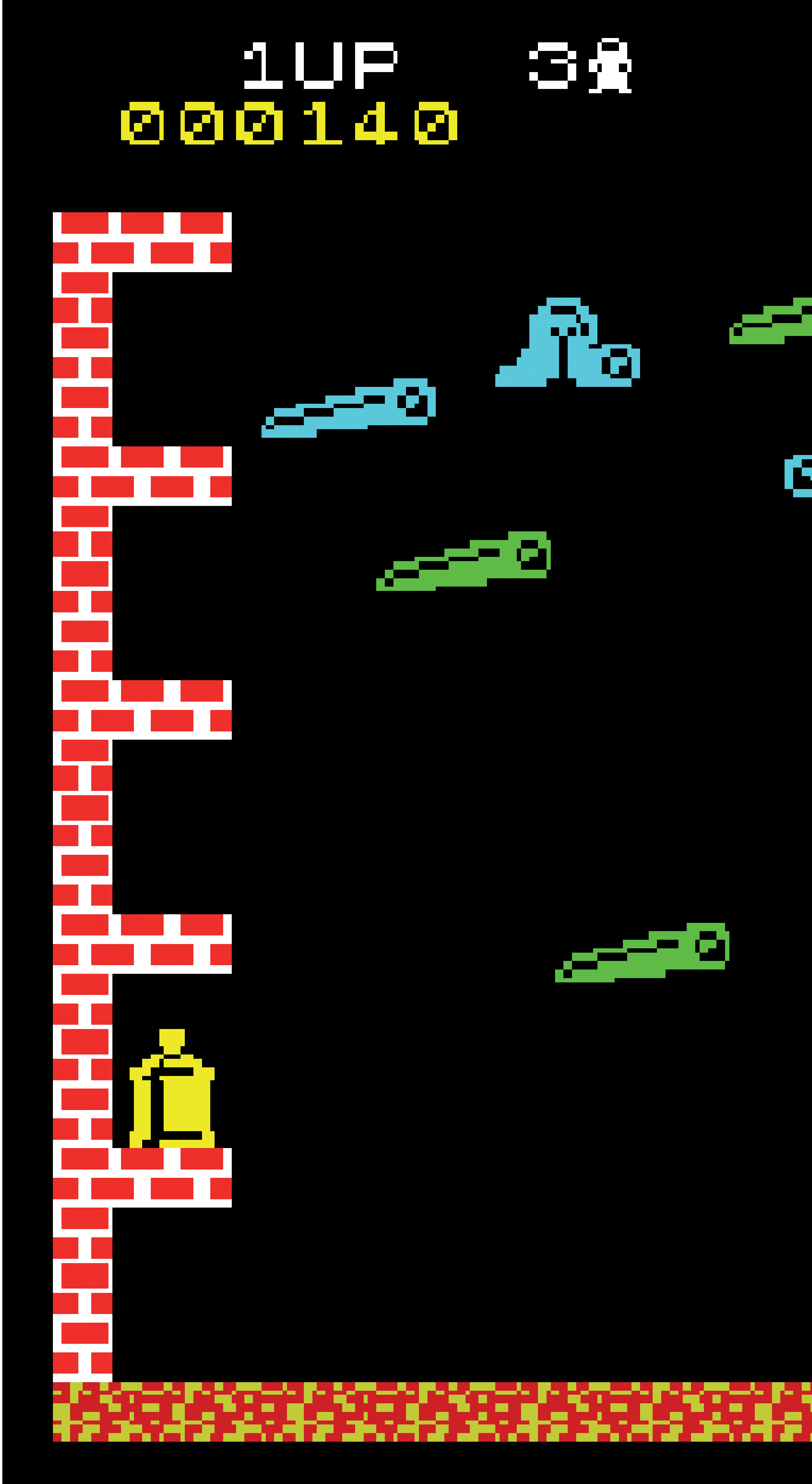
Ultimate continued to knock out a range of successful hits – the first 14 of which averaged 93 per cent in *Crash* magazine. *Pssst* continues to stand out, not just for its stunning graphics, but also for great gameplay that without doubt had the Stamper's magic green-fingered touch.

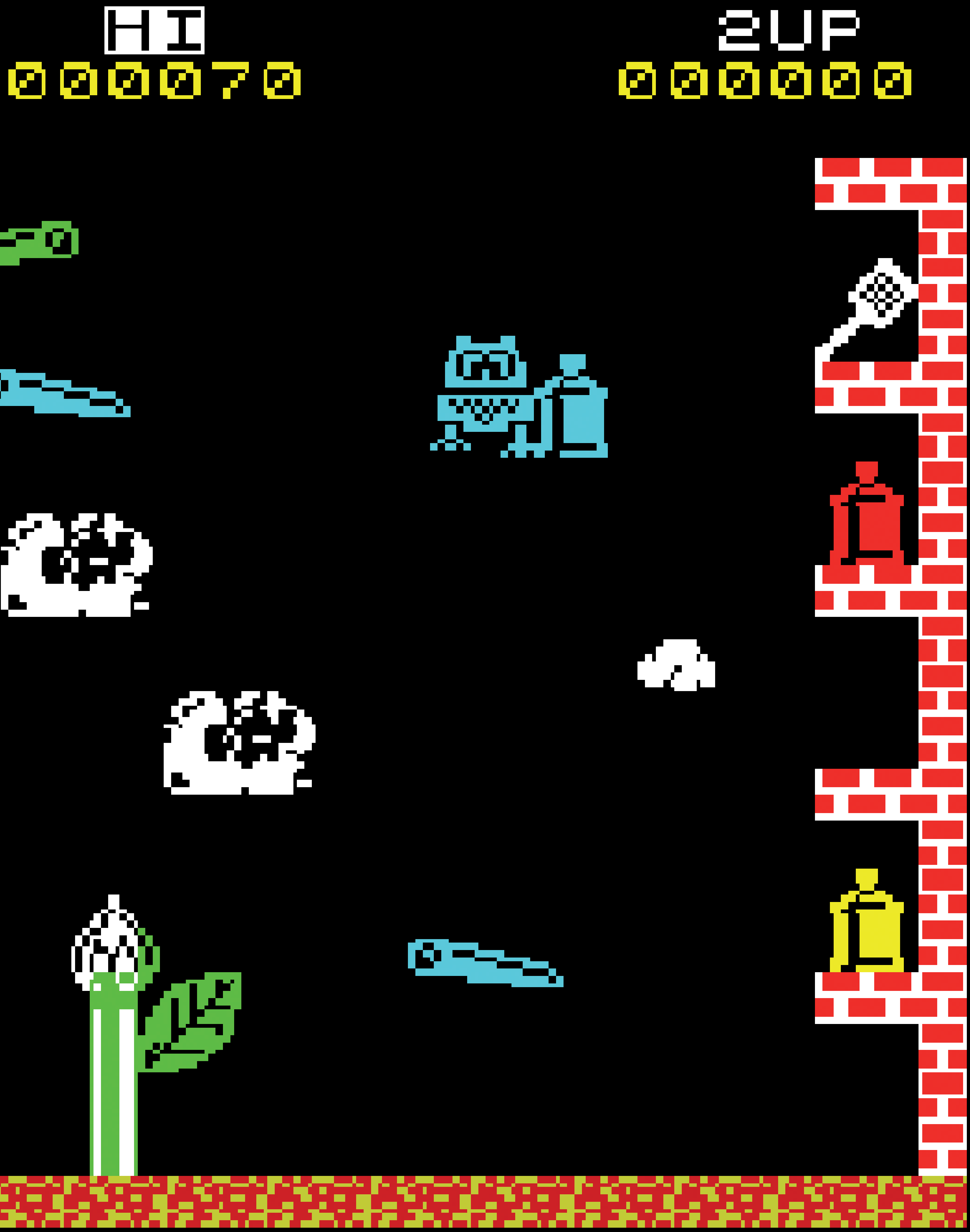
It was the cover art that first attracted me to *Pssst* – that and the name. Colourful, cute and intriguing, it drew me to pick it up and even today has the ability to make me smile. And I think it's because that cover encapsulates the fun concept, the whole imaginative wheeze about a robot aiming to protect his prize Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil from evil, destructive bugs by first picking up and then using various colour-coded spray cans all geared up to obliterate a particular insect.

It's a simple premise that plays out fast and furiously, not to mention relentlessly. As you save one plant you go up a level to save another, reaching once more for compost to help your plant grow, and trying hard to prevent it from death. To make life harder, Robbie also dies when he's hit by an insect.

More recently, there have been a few remakes of *Pssst,* mainly in Flash. Some succeed in giving the game a glossy sheen, but you can polish games like this for all they're worth and yet deep down it's pointless. It's hard to better the original concept, and charm can be lost when an old title is tarted up.

When you look back you realise that this game, which was written wholly in machine code, had all the ingredients of the pick-up-and-play gameplay and intuitive controls that casual game developers yearn to emulate today. It is an enduring gem so iconic you'd do well to snap up the rare and more expensive ROM cartridge version if only to sit back and admire the genius within.




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IN THE KNOW

- » **Name:** Operation Wolf
- » **Released:** 1987
- » **Publisher:** Taito
- » **Developer:** In-house
- » **Price:** Between £100-400 depending on condition
- » **By The Same Developer:** Chase HQ



COIN-OP CAPERS

#1 Operation Wolf

In a brand new feature, we take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance through those who know it best





The words '*Operation Wolf*' will likely conjure up one image in your memory: summer holidays spent down your local arcade with a pocketful of lives and a beaming smile as you blow away enemies like candles on a birthday cake. Its action-packed cabinet art, showing a Green Beret firing a machine gun while carrying a hostage, coupled with a realistic-looking Uzi with which to mow down virtual militia, was enough to make even the most ardent pacifist slot a coin down its throat.

Taito's *Operation Wolf* wasn't the first gun game to appear on the scene, but with a loud echo of the *Rambo* films emanating from the coin-op, it quickly became one of the most popular, able to turn a small child into a gun-toting hero, and, because the enemies all looked like *GI Joe* characters, parents didn't bat an eyelid.

While light gun games had appeared on the scene as far back as the late Thirties, *Operation Wolf* was really the first to have a story tying together its levels: your mission is to locate and rescue five hostages and then help them escape to safety. The early stages see Roy Adams trying to find the concentration camp where the hostages are being kept, and he does this by interrogating an enemy officer. Then, after a brief detour to save a village, Roy arrives at the camp, frees the prisoners and must provide covering fire as they run into the back of a C-123 military transport aircraft making its way down a runway.

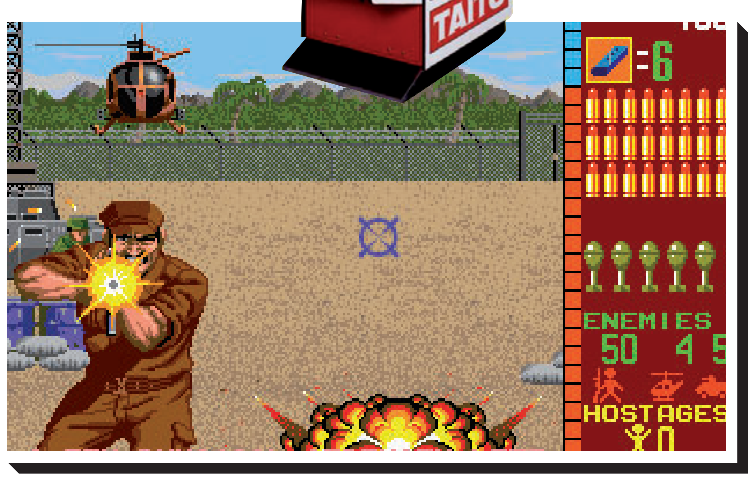
One interesting aspect of *Operation Wolf* is the fact that your efforts in the field affect the outcome. At the end of the game, the President will either be singing your praises or ripping shreds off you, depending on how many of the hostages you rescue, making *Operation Wolf*, as well as Taito's *Bubble Bobble* (1986) and *Arkanoid* (1986), one of the earliest arcade games to feature alternate endings. Weirdly, and contrary to this thinking, in the original Japanese version, the player is given the choice of which order to tackle the missions in; an option that appears in the Japan-only PC-Engine port.

The enemies that Roy faces include a variety of different soldiers and vehicles, and thanks to the fact that a stage only ends once a set number are destroyed, the action maintains a manic pace. But it isn't completely one-note, as the player must conserve ammo and also be careful to avoid shooting civilians that run into the fray. The latter feature has since become a staple, if annoying, part of gun game gameplay.

Since its release there has existed a small shadow of doubt as to whether *Operation Wolf* is actually a light gun game or not. As the gun is bolted to the arcade cabinet, many believe the game's controls actually work by having the crosshair on its screen steered by the gun mechanically, as opposed to light sensor technology. Well, the truth is that *Operation Wolf*'s Uzis did utilise the technology, but, as the light sensors were unreliable, manufacturers decided to rethink how the crosshair was controlled. They opted to use mechanical controllers with a potentiometer that would track the movement of the gun and relay the information to the screen. *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Operation Wolf*'s sequel, utilised this change.

Such was the popularity of *Operation Wolf*, it was ported to pretty much every platform in existence, with impressive ports by Ocean found on the Amiga, ST and various 8-bit micros, and TurboGrafx-16, Master System and NES conversions by Taito. More recently, the NES version of the game was made available to download on Nintendo's Virtual Console last year, and an arcade perfect-ish port was released as part of *Taito Legends*, alongside Taito's *Space Gun*. Sadly, neither game was given light gun support. *





COIN-OP CAPERS

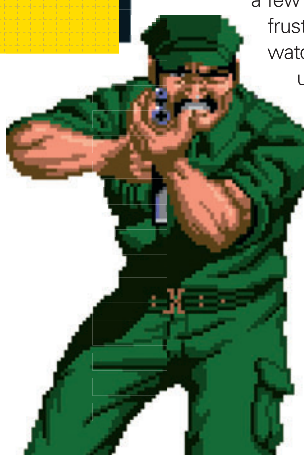
the expert



We caught up with Operation Wolf MAME world champion Rudy Chavez and sweated out the intel on how he managed to mow down 16,316,700 worth of enemy militia… without even using a gun!

PROFILE

» Name: Rudy Chavez
» Age: 33
» Date of Birth: 09/06/1975
» Current World Records:
Superman (coin-op)
1,914,900 points
Mercs (coin-op)
999,990 points
Alien 3: The Gun (coin-op)
17,630,000 points
Bionic Commando (MAME)
2,251,090 points
Chase HQ (MAME)
11,071,500 points



■ Retro Gamer: So do you remember the first time you saw *Operation Wolf*?
Rudy Chavez: Yes. When I was a kid I went alone to 7th and State of downtown LA and saw from a distance this odd-looking arcade that I thought was a carnival shooting game. I was amazed at the realism of the gun, with the epic intro graphics, so I put in a quarter, hit the start button and exploded with excitement with the shaking recoil feel of the gun. I felt like Rambo firing on those guerrilla soldiers and learnt right away how to use the rocket bombs correctly.

■ RG: Do you remember the first time you finished the game?
RC: I kept trying to finish the game but found the Airport Getaway area just too hard. So I stopped playing for a few months, because of the frustration, and only stood watching other gamers play until I saw this one person mowing down the enemies quickly and tactically. It was so amazing that he even looped it a few times. I learnt his tactical secrets that helped me to keep looping *Operation Wolf* back then. I now utilise my skills on the MAME version, but I also play other positional fixed gun games like *Alien 3: The Gun*, which I also hold the world record on.

■ RG: Can you tell us a little about your impressive high score on the game and what it feels like to be the Twin Galaxies MAME World Champion?
RC: I was given the title World Champion officially for a big reason, and that is I try to go further than what is already necessary to set a world record. I raise the level of difficulty all the way up and decimate it from start to end with no loss of life. MAME supports many types of control devices. The three basic classes of controllers are keyboard, mouse and joystick, and you may be wondering, 'Is it easier to use a light gun?'

■ RG: So what are the main advantages and disadvantages between using a gamepad and light gun for the game?
RC: The gamepad gives a positioning crosshair that helps you fire at enemies accurately, but moving it is time-consuming and making a rapid decision during an unexpected heavy firefight can be tricky.

The light gun offers true aiming accuracy and gives fast response to any direction, but you need to fire the gun most of the time to know your aiming direction. Doing this causes ammo to decrease rapidly.

The mouse gives a positioning crosshair with smooth scrolling and

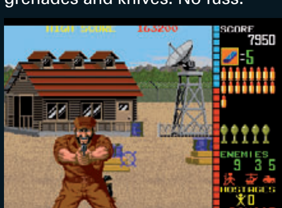
» Rudy demonstrates his skills at the world-famous Funspot arcade in New Hampshire.



Know your enemy

Listen up, maggots. To ensure you don't come home in a body bag, you'll need to know what you're up against…

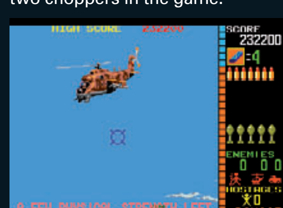
Soldiers
The soldiers serve as basic cannon fodder and generally take one shot to drop. Watch out for grenades and knives. No fuss.





Armoured Truck
Being that these are made of steel and have a top-mounted turret, they are tricky enemies to destroy. Take them out

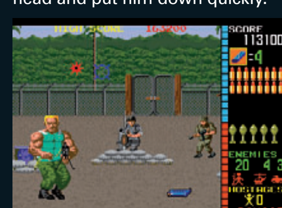
Helicopter
Like the truck, these give you a few moments to spot them and take them down. There are two choppers in the game.





Boat
The boats only make an appearance in the jungle stage and are the easiest vehicles to take out. Aim for the gunner.

Duke Nukem
Okay, it's not actually the Duke, but you have to agree the similarity is striking. Aim for the head and put him down quickly.

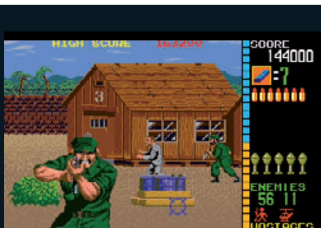


speed, but the durability of the mouse may fail during long gameplay of input stress at a greater rate. An example is rapidly clicking and grip pressure. Also it's an absolute hand workout once you are two hours into the game.

■ **RG: As well as the obvious, what are the main differences between the MAME and coin-op versions of *Operation Wolf*?**
RC: The real arcade [machine] of *Operation Wolf* is far superior for many reasons. The cabinet has a mounted metal Uzi gun with force feedback and mechanical vibration to mimic the feel of recoil every time you pull and hold down the trigger. MAME cannot replace the real deal; it can emulate any arcade game but not the actual feel of it.

■ **RG: Can you tell us a little more about your *Operation Wolf* world record? How did you manage to reach such an impressive score?**
RC: My world record *Operation Wolf* MAME score of 16,316,700 is one of my best long-enduring challenges I've accomplished. It took around four hours to complete and I had to continually move my mouse rapidly, firing and blasting the enemies constantly, since this was set on the hardest difficulty setting. It was hellish whenever I looped the game, and the only rest I had was when a stage was completed or the last mission was finished. I was determined to go the farthest I had ever done and when I did it I was so thrilled.

■ **RG: How did you manage to maintain concentration on the game for so long?**
RC: You know, the funny thing is on the early tries I broke my mouse during the battles and ended with around 5 million points. One day I hope to be sponsored to go to Funspot again to beat my own MAME world record on the actual *Operation Wolf*. *



Knifemen
The knifemen only crop up during the last two stages but will ignore you and kill the hostages. Take them out quickly or the mission will be in vain.

RUDY'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

The expert Operation Wolf player reveals his personal tips and strategy to mastering the game and racking up those high scores

1 ■ **MUNITIONS**
Every commando knows that running out of ammo means running out of life, so reserve ammo by not auto-firing during battle, and save your rocket bombs for more serious situations and destroying the light armoured vehicles, gunboats and whirlybirds.

2 ■ **STATUS BAR**
It's important to pay close attention to your health, munitions and number of enemies you have to kill. This way you know what to expect if any ambush occurs. Remember that any hostage or villager you kill will deplete one health cube.

3 ■ **ITEMS**
The jungles sure contain plenty of wild things, but luckily *Operation Wolf* has a lot of wild scattered items for you to find. Shoot the coconuts and animals to reveal items and bonuses. Sometimes, though, items will just randomly appear.

4 ■ **MILITARY TERRAIN STRATEGY**
In the Communication Camp stage, try to conserve as much ammo as you can. On Jungle Camp always aim for gunboats and paratroopers first. On the Village stage try not to use any rockets, but in the Munitions Base stage feel free to use rockets at will. On the Concentration Camp stage, try not to use any rockets, and finally, on the Airport stage, try to save all the hostages before using rockets.

5 ■ **BRUTE FORCE ROCKET BOMBS**
The best tactic to mow down enemies quickly is to use the rockets when they group together. Kill two, three, possibly five birds with one rocket grenade, as it were. Also, keep yourself safe by having at least two rockets for life-threatening moments.

sequel piggy

We take a look at the follow-up missions of Taito's popular war franchise



Operation Thunderbolt
Released: 1988
Operation Thunderbolt is a fine follow-up that remains true to the elements that made the original game such a massive hit. This time Roy is joined by fellow Green Beret Hardy Jones, and both men are tasked with saving American hostages from a hijacked plane. Tweaks to the gameplay include the action now scrolling into the screen as well as horizontally, plenty more hostages to rescue, and the odd first-person vehicle section. Perhaps owing to the fact that the game could be played in co-op, *Thunderbolt* is a more challenging game than the original, although the benefit of being able to continue from where you fall – except during the final boss fight – does balance things out a shade.



Operation Wolf 3
Released: 1994
The third game feels like an *Operation Wolf* game in name only, and given how bad the English in the game is – our favourite quote is: "The nuclear missile is fire. Down with it before time limit" – it's a wonder Taito even managed to get that right. The game is clearly from the dreaded post-*Lethal Enforcers* epoch of gun games, and drops the timeless sprites in favour of digitised actors and dull gameplay. With no Roy or Hardy to take charge – instead we get a Clive Owen lookalike and a woman who looks like Daryl Hannah in *Blade Runner* – and an army of enemies dressed like they're at a rave, this game almost takes a combat knife to the throat of the series.



Operation Tiger
Released: 1999
In 1999 Taito released its final *Operation Wolf* title, *Operation Tiger*. It once again changed the look of the franchise, going all *Time Crisis* and *Virtua Cop* in opting for graphics made up of polygons. Astute readers will have probably already twigged that *Operation Wolf* is one of the few gun game franchises to have ticked every box in the visual evolution of the genre. The plot is set in good ol' 199X where Nation X has been taking over neighbouring oil-producing nations. You join the mission at the point where it has proved an abject failure and are tasked with trying to rescue your fallen comrades and help them escape.

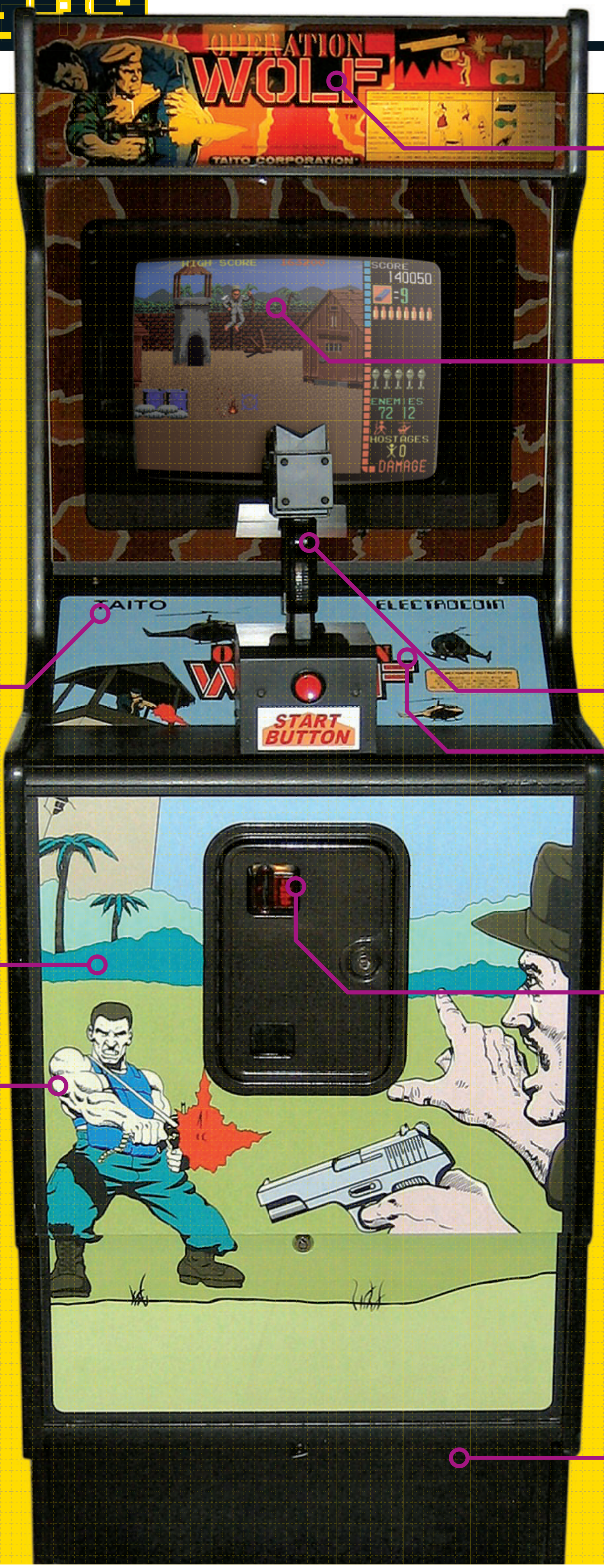
COIN-OP CAPERS

the machine

We have a brief chat with Jamma+'s Chris Nightingale about his recently restored Operation Wolf cabinet. If only it was ours...



"I purchased the Electrocoin *Operation Wolf* cabinet in a semi-working state off eBay from a guy who had it in his home for the past five years. It was in reasonable condition bar the usual scuffs and cigarette burns you find on any arcade game of that age. The restoration process took a couple of months and mainly consisted of cosmetic restoration as well as fixing a few technical issues. The hardest aspect of the restoration was the monitor, because it wasn't something that I could actually repair myself."



TAITO

Taito was formed in 1953 under the name Taito Trading Company. The company released numerous arcade hits during the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, including *Bubble Bobble*, *Arkanoid* and *Space Invaders*. It is now owned by Square Enix.

ARTWORK



"As with all these old machines, the artwork did have the odd battle scar due to years of service, so I decided to restore it to its former glory. I decided to recreate the artwork from scratch myself and apply it directly over the original. I then recreated it in Paint Shop Pro, which was a fairly time-intensive process. The results came out really well."

PCB

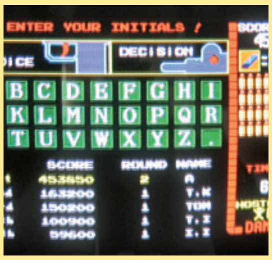


"At the heart of the machine is the game software, which runs from a PCB that has connections to all the controls, the monitor and the speakers. Again, these are the sorts of electronics that you don't really want to be fiddling with unless you know what you are doing. I was lucky in that the board worked perfectly, but I've still invested in a spare board, just in case."

MARQUEE

Like many arcade marquees, *Operation Wolf*'s is designed to both attract punters – it's backlit – and show them how to play the game, with this marquee clearly showing who you need to avoid shooting and your weapons.

MONITOR



"The main technical problem was that the gun didn't register any hits on the screen – a common fault for a number of reasons. This particular fault was due to the monitor and required a reasonable amount of work to fix and was beyond my expertise. Luckily, Craig at Giz10p (**www.giz10p.co.uk**) was able to help me."

THE GUN



"The most important feature of the game is the gun, which is modelled on the IMI Mini Uzi 9mm. As this is something that is handled all the time, it had a number of dents and scratches and a lot of surface rust. I stripped down what I could and removed all the existing paint, primed it and then finished it off with a re-spray. I also cleaned up the start button and the lens within the gun, and reproduced the 'Start Button' label. I've also purchased some spare guns and restored those as well, just in case something ever goes wrong."

ELECTROCOIN

Electrocoin was responsible for manufacturing *Operation Wolf* throughout the UK and has been in business for over 30 years. It is still handling titles for Taito, with its latest release being 2007's *Chase HQ 2*.

COIN MECH



"Although the cabinet had a coin mechanism (Coin Controls C220) that accepted 10p, 20p, 50p and £1 coins, the previous owner didn't bother using it. I decided to keep the coin mechanism, but it was out of date, programmed with the old 50p coin and needed updating to the current one. I was able to get one from Swallow Amusement Machines (**www.coin.demon.co.uk**)."

SIDE ART

Chris hasn't recreated the original side art, so here's a picture of it. It depicts the lone wolf gunning down unseen enemies with a POW slung over his shoulder. Powerful and effective.



developer Q&A

We speak to Colin Porch and David Blake, who worked on the Commodore 64 port of the game for Ocean software



■ RG: So, how did you get the gig?
CP: I was an in-house programmer for Ocean, as was David Blake. We were shown the arcade version and asked if we could convert it to the C64. I could see all sorts of technical problems, but the answer, as usual, was: "We'll give it our best shot!"

■ RG: Did you receive any support from the original developer?
CP: Not that I recall, apart from having access to the arcade machine. We certainly didn't get any source code.
DB: None. Apart from them supplying the arcade board, and to be honest I'm not sure they even did that. We had a room full of boards hooked up to monitors. To my knowledge, none of us ever had any technical support from the original developer. We didn't need any. All we needed was access to the original game. I would say it took us 4-5 months to complete the conversion. By the time we had finished I was an expert!

■ RG: Which 8-bit version do you feel was the best?
CP: I'm not sure that I saw the others in any great detail, but all were pretty good if I remember. Certainly I did not think that a better job could have been done on the C64.
DB: To be honest, I can't remember. But I think ours was the most faithful, and many C64 gamers appreciated the unique technical qualities of the game. I can't think of another scrolling C64 game with a vertical split. No. This never happened to my knowledge.

■ RG: How long did the conversion take and how many of you worked on it?
CP: On the programming side, just myself and David. But there were lots of others involved in graphics, sound effects and music. I'm not sure that I can remember them all… Steve Wahid and Keith Tinman, I seem to recall, but I'm sure that there were others. Such projects usually took a few months, and deadlines, when eventually given, had to be stuck to! Lots of midnight oil spent!
DB: As I was the new boy at Ocean, and very young even by their standards (16), they thought it would »



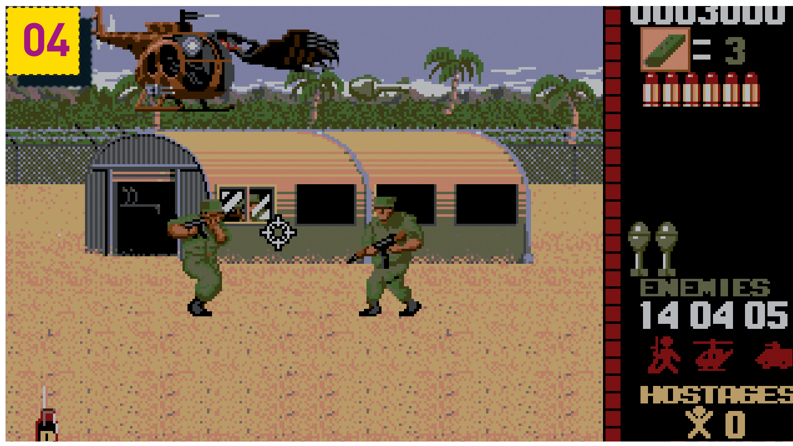
COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions

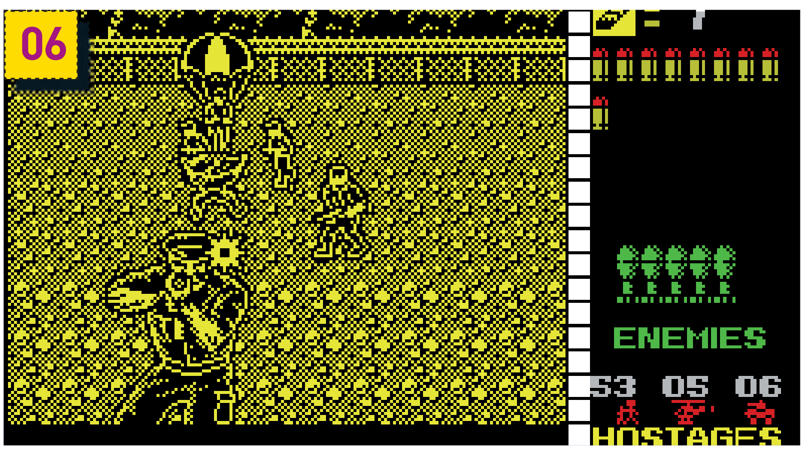


Taito's Operation Wolf received a number of home conversions, but which was the best? Find out now as we play every single one…











01. NES
(Worst Version)
The tagline for this version, 'Take No Prisoners', is a little misleading, given that your mission was to do just that. Anyway, the NES version is one of the weakest ports. The graphics are squashed, stubby versions of the arcade game, and playing it using the Zapper ironically makes the game almost impossible, with questionable accuracy and a lack of a quick fire function. Stick to the controller.

02. Master System (Best Version)
Now this is more like it. The console's light gun works brilliantly and far more responsively than the NES Zapper, the graphics are bold and colourful, and rockets are fired using the second controller, allowing you to position the control pad on the floor like a *Time Crisis* pedal and use your foot to launch grenades. This is as good as it was likely to get from the SMS.

03. Amiga
In terms of graphics, the Amiga port does a great job of replicating the arcade sprites. Also, the scrolling feels smooth for the most part, and this is a decent stab at replicating the coin-op. The only gripes we have are the fact that it comes on two disks and that load times are lengthy. Also, ammo seems sparse and there is slowdown when things get chaotic, but this isn't a bad conversion at all.

04. Atari ST
There's not much to split the Amiga and ST versions, aside from the usual: the graphics aren't as colourful and the scrolling isn't as smooth, although you'd struggle to notice. So the graphics look a little drabber, but so what? War isn't supposed to be pretty, right?

05. Amstrad CPC
In terms of the 8-bit micros, the Amstrad walks away with the trophy. Owing to the machine's wonderfully fulsome colour palette, Arnold is perfectly suited to taking on the chunky aesthetics of the coin-op, and this conversion doesn't disappoint. The graphics look great, if a little bit garish and blocky, and the scrolling is surprisingly smooth. The controls feel solid and responsive, and even steering the crosshair using the keyboard is enjoyable.







06. ZX Spectrum

Given the frenetic nature of the gameplay, the lack of colour puts the Spectrum at a disadvantage. Regardless, this remains a decent port, and Ocean did a great job at converting the arcade game to the humble Spectrum. It starts off well, with a neat homage to the coin-op, and things go as well as could be expected. The scrolling is smooth, controls responsive and the graphics detailed.

07. Commodore 64

The C64 port is another excellent rendition. And while the colours look a little washed-out, they help make everything on screen look better defined and easier to shoot. The scrolling is nippy, and this version works brilliantly with a light gun. Another solid port.

08. PC-Engine/ TurboGrafx-16

As you would expect, the PC-Engine port looks the business. In terms of visuals and arcade feel, this is the best it got in 1987 without forking out for the actual arcade board. This version also boasts a two-player mode, allows you to set the pace of the action with three speed settings, and even lets you pick the order of levels to tackle, but it isn't light gun compatible because no light gun was ever released for the PC-Engine. Shame.

developer Q&A cont.

» be a good idea for me to work as their top C64 programmer's 'helper', or 'apprentice', if you like. That was Colin, who already had a number of successful titles under his belt. In the late summer of '87 Colin had started on *Gryzor*, which was the first game I worked on. All the 'tunnel' sequences were mine, and Colin did the rest of the main scrolling game. That game was tough because we aimed to fit it in one load, which we managed in the end. I think every byte of the C64 memory was used, and *Operation Wolf* was the next one. Another tough game. I know I worked on all the baddie animation sequencing. I think the main scroll routine might have been mine too. I'm not sure now.

■ RG: Did you work on any of the other versions?
CP: No. Although I could understand Z80 and 68000 code, there were a lot of technical details about the other machines that I did not know. We all tended to work with the machines we were good at.

■ RG: Had you played the game before?
CP: Only on the arcade machine, and I was rubbish at that. I usually got somebody else to play up to the level I wanted to see. I was in my forties even then and was considered a 'Grandad' in the industry.

■ RG: What's most difficult about conversions?
CP: It varies from game to game. The most difficult technical bit in *Operation Wolf* was the nature of the display. The right-hand part of the screen had to be static, while the left-hand part had to scroll left to right. The Commodore 64 had great scrolling capabilities, but the whole screen had to scroll. The effect was eventually obtained by manipulating the character data for the right-hand part in the opposite direction. So it was scrolling, but it appeared to be static. Where the two met was a horrible jumble, but it was covered with the energy level sprite. I got asked for years afterwards how it was managed. Programmers thought I had managed to somehow interrupt the scrolling mechanism…

I also seem to remember a lot of problems adjusting the helicopter sprites so that they did not appear in front of the static data. I think David did a lot of work there.
DB: As Colin said, the biggest problem was the static area to the right. We originally started writing a version with all that stuff at the bottom of the screen, which is far easier – ask any C64 programmer why! Then we came up with a clever solution, which was shifting the character definitions in that right-hand area one pixel at a time in sequence with the scrolling, which made those characters appear static. It took a big slice of the processing 'pie', but the scrolling was relatively slow anyway, so it wasn't a problem. We managed it somehow! ★



The Making Of…



Apidya II

The critically acclaimed Apidya could well be the greatest horizontal shooter ever created for the Amiga. Mike Bevan talks to the three men responsible for this gripping backyard apocalypse…

If you weren't an Amiga owner back in the Nineties, chances are you may not have heard of German developer Kaiko. Formed in 1990 by programmer Peter Theirolf, graphic artist Frank Matzke and musician Chris Huelsbeck, its gaming legacy amounts to just a handful of officially published titles: *Gem'X*, *Gem'Z* and *Apidya*. Despite its limited output, Kaiko's games stood out alongside the majority of European-produced software due to their distinctive visual flair and detail, heavily inspired by Japanese gaming, manga and animation. None more so than *Apidya*, an exceptional shoot-'em-up with a bizarre but strangely appealing game world populated by bullet-spewing bugs and assorted creepy-crawlies. It's so good that it deserves a place alongside its influences in the all-time shooter hall of fame, if only for the fact that it considerably bettered pretty much every 'Euro-shmup' of its era. *Project-X*, we're looking at you…

"I had known Chris for a couple of years – we had worked together before he got hired by Rainbow Arts to create his great Amiga soundtracks, for games like *The Great Giana Sisters* – but Frank and I met because a mutual friend told us we could work together on games," remembers Peter. "We all liked Japanese coin-op and console games a lot, and that's mainly where my interest came from. But I also had a small collection of Japanese VHS imports of *Akira*, *Silent Möbius* etc. At that time there were no manga or anime publishers in Europe, so it made it even more interesting to follow that route," adds Frank.

"Frank and I teamed up and we decided to set up a company in order to sort out the legal stuff," continues Peter. "Chris was still working for Rainbow Arts but we planned that he would join us later after finishing some audio work. The name Kaiko was mainly chosen because of its Japanese sound and the design possibilities," he explains. "I think it started as a Taito rip-off, but I can't remember if we had an actual Japanese meaning when we decided on the name. Later I've been told it means 'silk worm' as well as 'undress a suit'. I don't know whether or not that is true…"

> **"With this new blaster will come fame and fortune for Play Byte. This is the best shoot-'em-up-ever"** MARK RAMSHAW, AMIGA POWER

While working on the anime-style puzzle game *Gem'X*, inspiration for Kaiko's next project came quickly, from a local arcade. "I was quite a fan especially of *R-Type* and some of the *Gradius* games – I really loved those side-scrolling shooters," says Peter. "With *R-Type*, I especially liked the clear and colourful graphical style, the design of it in all details. *R-Type* and *Vulcan Venture* (*Gradius II*) were my absolute favourites in terms of gameplay. There was nothing comparable on the Amiga, so we decided to do something similar."

At first, Peter and Frank began working on a prototype with a more traditional 'spaceship' setting, which later transformed, like *Apidya*'s bee hero, into a totally different beast. "I started on the code under the name of 'scroll.asm' and I created some side-scrolling code. I looked very closely at the arcade games of that time – one of the main influences was *Gradius III*. Working on the code, I added some technical stuff to display playfields using the Amiga's sprites. When I reached 'scroll4.asm', I had the player ship shooting bullets and scrolling past a huge starfield with some giant animated suns in the backdrop. Everything was very technical."



» [Amiga] Flying too close to these poison bottles in the sewer triggers a startling graphics effect that we'll let you discover yourselves…

A glance around these pages will reveal that a large chunk of the final game is about as removed from the standard space shooter as possible. The opening stages, 'Meadow's Edge' and 'The Pond', feature elegant pastoral backgrounds and a host of authentically recreated real-life creatures that could have sprung from the pages of a *National Geographic* feature on European natural history. "The 'insect garden' theme must be 100 per cent credited to Frank," says Peter. "I can't remember any brainstorming where the whole team contributed to that idea, I really think it was the work of solitary genius. However, once the idea was there, we all had plenty of ideas to add to the environment." Frank is modest about his inspiration for the game's unique setting. "It all started after a coin-op session of *Insector X*, but we wanted to try something very naturalistic, which nobody else had done before," he says.

"I owned a library of books that covered insects and fish, but it was a bit of a challenge given that the animations had to look natural, which wasn't easy due to memory limitations. There were also technical considerations – for example the mantis is a fairly monochrome creature and

What's In A Name?

In case you were wondering, and unlike a lot of other shoot-'em-ups we could mention, the name *Apidya* does have a bit of logic behind it, as Frank explains: "It's indeed based on the scientific term for bee-like insects (Apidae) but we gave it a bit of a spin to end up with something that sounds original," he confirms.

Another question the ex-Kaiko guys get asked a lot regards the game's title screen. This features a second, larger logo using what appears to be Japanese katakana characters, alongside the Roman numeral II, leading a number of Amiga owners to wonder if there was a prequel to the game out there somewhere. "[That] the first game was released exclusively in Japan on LaserDisc was our answer back then!" laughs Frank. "Actually, *After Burner*'s title screen referred to a prequel nobody really knew, so we simply did the same. Nobody in the team actually spoke Japanese and I believe I had bought a pocket guide in some shop in London on a visit to ECTS, which allowed me to translate the name… sort of. Many fans came up with better versions, of course."

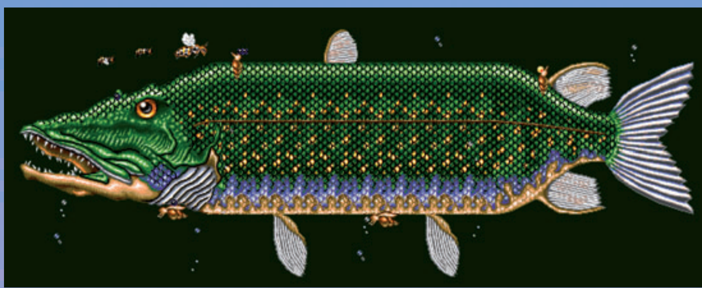


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** PLAY BYTE/TEAM17
- » **DEVELOPER:** KAIKO
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GEM'X (PICTURED), SUPER GEM'Z



APIDYA



» [Amiga] *Apidya*'s enormous pike boss. Inspired by *R-Type*'s mothership? "Nooo, of course not… An homage of some sort, maybe," teases Frank. "We all loved *R-Type* and that level, so it was a natural fit to add the giant pike."

Peter rebuilt the engine to be able to cope with such large objects, which required a switch to just eight colours for the mantis."

"Some of the ideas came for technical reasons. Because we were able to do some cool things we tried to find enemies where we could use these techniques – the giant pike boss is a good example," says Peter. "However, we mainly iterated through animals we knew from the garden and fields so we didn't have to reach that far."

Apidya was an ambitious project, the five main stages being split into a handful of sub-levels, each with a boss. It also features a number of technically impressive hidden bonus stages. Much of the game's cutting-edge graphics tech was the result of Peter's rapid mastery of the Amiga as a programming platform.

"I was learning new things about the Amiga all the time when I was working on the game," he recalls. "It was great fun because of the level of control you have – on the other hand there wasn't even the idea of something like a producer or a schedule, so there was not much pressure until late in the project. We just did it, one level after the other."

"There main issue was lack of knowledge," he admits. "There was no internet, there were no people around that were coding anywhere close to the level I did, so I had to discover everything myself. I didn't even know the concept of a code linker, so I copied the source code of a level to a new file and changed it until it turned into a new level. That was utterly stupid, but it was just the way I worked. But there were no real technical issues to solve because we designed the game to make good use of the Amiga hardware. We just designed features that would fit and work."

Apidya's weapon upgrade system is particularly well-realised, and very similar in feel to its Japanese counterparts. "The weapon upgrade system was just copied from *Gradius*," confesses Peter. "We felt that was a working system so we just took it. In terms of the weapons, I wanted to have a spread shot and a loading power shot, but I don't remember too much about the others."

Surprisingly, given *Apidya*'s level of visual realism, Frank remains self-critical in terms of the various 'bug' animations. "I'm not really happy with that part at all – it was actually pretty ugly to do because we needed so many frames for the wings, versus a fairly static spaceship."

The game's title music is also noteworthy in utilising seven sound channels, or 'voices', a system Chris had debuted in his *Turrican II* soundtrack. "I was really interested in the 'Hollywood' sound and wanted to create something cinematic," he explains. "I had been playing around with orchestral samples, and it was one of my first pieces that I wanted to sound like an orchestra."

"We didn't have the processing power for this in-game so switched to the Amiga's standard four voices. The premise was to create something upbeat, and I really had fun with it. Since it was such an abstract game, I didn't have to conform to any clichéd styles, which is why every level sounds so different. The techno level is a kind of megamix of the time with lots of funny samples."

Completion of the game took a while by modern standards, pushing two years,

A Frank Guide To Apidya

Graphic artist **Frank Matzke** comments on the various stages of the game



LEVEL ONE: 'MEADOW'S EDGE'

"The first thing I actually drew were the key background elements, especially the main grass tile as well as the dandelion. I copied the latter from a book about homeopathic medicine that my mum used to read at that time."



LEVEL TWO: 'THE POND'

"Having seen or caught many of the animals myself gave me lots of inspiration, especially for the water level. Water was always a big deal for videogames and we had a garden pond and several fish tanks at home, so this was a no brainer."



LEVEL THREE: 'SEWERS BLAST'

"We started getting a bit bored with all the strictly 'natural' stuff and wanted to take the game in a slightly different direction with the sewer level. Its more gory approach was a lot of fun to draw!"



LEVEL FOUR: 'TECHNO PARTY'

"The first three levels used 32 colours, but we wanted bigger and more sprites, so we switched to a scenario that worked well in 16 colours. Visually it was way too different, and I hate not having kept the style in line with the first three."



LEVEL FIVE: 'BOSS PANIC'

"After two years of developing *Apidya*, we needed to finally finish the game and went for a series of boss battles rather than a 'real' level. Definitely the weakest part of the game and something I would rather like to forget about!"



THE BONUS LEVELS

"We had so many unused ideas for using the Amiga tech as much as possible that we tried to design little 'level snippets', which allowed us to feature certain innovations, such as Peter's sprite-based parallax effect."

“Apidya is the single best shmup ever released for the Amiga platform” ALEX VORMBROCK, SHMUPS.COM

in fact. “It took that long because we did various other games and projects in between to keep the cash coming in to finance *Apidya*’s production. There was no publisher that paid for the office, so we always had to look for a quick source of income. That’s why *Apidya* is, at least graphically, so inconsistent. At least I was lucky enough to have parents who supported me during those slightly rough early years in the industry.”

Published in Germany through Blue Byte’s subsidiary label, Play Byte, *Apidya* wasn’t released in the UK until it was picked up by Team17 as a budget title. “It was a tad unfortunate that we didn’t get a proper UK release until long after the original German one, so basically everybody had a pirated copy long before the game appeared on store shelves,” laments Frank.

“I was mainly disappointed that we couldn’t iterate on the title, because we really received rave reviews,” says Peter. “I would have loved to have created a better sequel. Frank and Chris are both really gifted and the games we created together were great. However, we all lacked business talents back then that could have saved us from our destiny…”

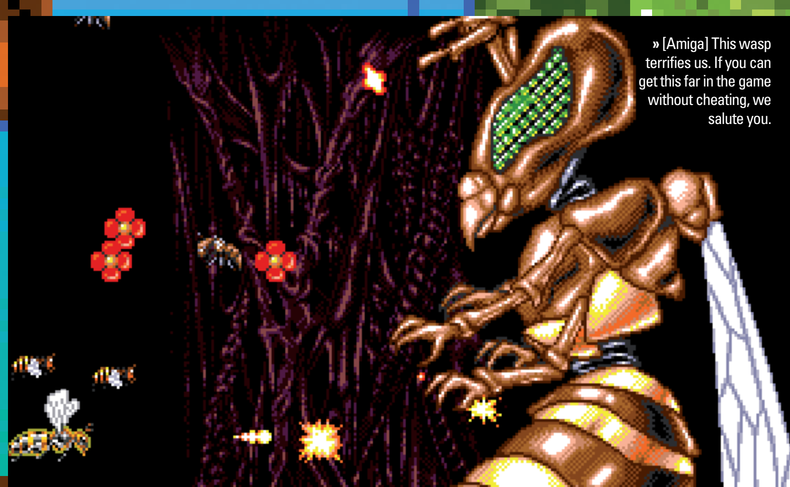
Kaiko closed its doors in 1995, and given Chris’s heritage with the series, it seems fitting that the last major project the trio would work on together was the Amiga version of *Turrican 3*. Despite its distinctive, anime-influenced style and personality, its own games never proved as popular with the European market as hoped. “In hindsight it wasn’t the most mass-compatible style and we should’ve gone for a more traditional one,” says Frank. “But funnily enough, we had a handful of Japanese fans who really liked that we did Amiga games with a Japanese touch.”

Although *Apidya* is now considered a cult classic, Peter reflects on whether their original, more traditional, space-themed shooter might have perhaps been more marketable. “I hadn’t thought about stuff like competitive analysis or the likes in those days,” he says. “Really, not that much earlier you could sell games about crazy llamas or have the player being chased by flying toilet bowls. Probably you could have sold anything back then if the publisher wanted to and the game was great and had great reviews. But I was pleased with the review of *Project-X* [compared to] *Apidya* in *Amiga Power* where *Apidya* was rated as the best Amiga shoot-’em-up ever. That had to be enough…”

And we couldn’t agree more. There’s nothing else quite like *Apidya* on the Amiga platform, and it has a special place in the hearts of die-hard shooter fans and old-school gamers alike. “Of all the games I had the chance to work on, this was the most personal one,” says Frank. “I don’t think that it was my best work, but we just had a blast creating the game – especially because Peter was such an amazing engineer who basically rewrote the engine for every single stage to get the most out of the Amiga, and to deliver a console/coin-op-like shmup experience. And Chris did a marvellous job with *Apidya*’s soundtrack.”

“I still believe we added so many unique details, like supporting game pads and all the hidden levels, that we were at least something special among lots of similar games. *Apidya* defined what Kaiko was all about: a unique visual approach, great tech, awesome sound and solid gameplay with lots of little surprises. Or at least that’s how we liked to see it.”

“I am definitely proud of *Apidya*,” admits Peter. “We managed a really good piece of software that also helped define what the Amiga could deliver. I must admit that it’s a long time since I played through the full game – I guess my reflexes dwindle – but not so long that I played it on one of my actual Amigas. I also watched a couple of the YouTube videos and I had some tears in my eyes after doing so. It’s great that there are still so many people out there enjoying it. To me, as a professional developer, the consoles have replaced that because I still have a powerful system where I can touch the hardware directly. But for all the hobby programmers, Windows is no replacement for the joy of programming a home computer down to the metal…”



» [Amiga] This wasp terrifies us. If you can get this far in the game without cheating, we salute you.



"With Gauntlet, I learned what it means to put together 30 seconds of gameplay. If someone can have fun in 30 seconds, you've got them"

Bob's mentor Ed Logg teaches him a life lesson in half a minute

FAMOUS FOR
Marble Madness
Gauntlet

FIRST JOB
Software Reproduction, Demo Creation

CURRENT JOB
Lead Engineer

FAVOURITE FILM
Star Wars IV: A New Hope

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Thriller, Michael Jackson

FIRST COMPUTER
Apple II (four colour)

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Marble Madness
Gauntlet

BEST-SELLING GAME
Gauntlet

BEST HOLIDAY
Hawaii with the family

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH?
Other than having them stranded as a bad thing, my wife and kids.

145235-46746546546546

SEX
M

NAME
Bob Flanagan

DATE OF BIRTH
16 AUG 1962

PLACE OF BIRTH
Oklahoma

BIOGRAPHY
From coding games on the Apple II, Bob joined Atari in the Eighties and worked on such arcade classics as *Paperboy*, *Gauntlet* and *Marble Madness*. He currently works at Electronic Arts on its hugely successful *The Sims* franchise.

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DESERT • ISLAND • DISKS

Bob Flanagan

What cherished games would you take to the island?

He's been on the software engineering scene since the Seventies and lost his marbles twice, but Bob Flanagan still loves making games. He tells Paul Drury about delivering on Paperboy and working at Atari and EA

Google 'Bob Flanagan' and the results will yield a description containing the word 'supermasochist'. Now, we knew that producing games in the early days was tough, but was it really that painful? "That's a different Bob Flanagan," laughs our man. "I've never driven any nails through my body. There's definitely been more pleasure than pain."

Bob's journey began in Beverly Hills, tapping in listings from David Ahl's famous *101 Basic Computer Games* book on his school's punch-card computer terminal. Aged five, he moved to the glamorous LA suburb with his mother, and by 16 he'd knocked out his first full game, 1978's *Speedway*. It was followed two years later with *Seawolf*, also for Apple II, proving that imitation was the sincerest form of flattery.

"Most of my early Apple games were copies of arcade games," Bob acknowledges. "That was the most effective way for me to get something that worked and learn from that experience. They were both based on games of the same name – that's how blatant it was. I was just making them for fun and for the challenge… then I met Dave Gordon and he wanted to sell them. Hey, I can make some money."

Bob's involvement with Gordon's Programma International, one of the first software publishers in America, was pivotal. He worked for the company copying tapes and producing demos along with full games. Then, frustrated with the lack of challenge in the computer science curriculum, he dropped out of college in 1982 and continued to produce games for Gordon's new venture Data Most. *Spectre*, released in 1982, proved his talents were improving, its mixture of a 2D map with a 3D maze anticipating his future work on *Xybots*.



Bob (second from right) in period dress for a Cyberball flyer

Trivia

Bob began in the industry while still at school, landing a summer job reproducing tapes of Apple II games for Programma International, one of the first publishers of computer software

"With *Spectre* I was desperately trying to create a 3D *Pac-Man*, to extend that game in a new way," he explains. "Getting the 3D graphics working was my first real test. Compared with others at the time, I was definitely on the mid to lower end of technical skill." He laughs modestly, but Bob never shied away from a challenge. When Gordon asked him to produce a game to showcase the Panasonic JR200, [No, we hadn't heard of it, either – Ed], he spent six weeks learning the intricacies of the machine's CPU and tweaked BASIC to produce a version of one of his Apple II titles, *Thief*.

"Dave made a deal with Panasonic to produce software for their new machine," recalls Bob. "It was very different to the Apple, which was based on bitmaps and pixels. The JR200 used programmable characters, but hey, I enjoyed the challenge. The machine was introduced at the 1983 Consumer Electronic Show in Las Vegas. They flew me there and sat me in a hotel room to spend an all-nighter getting it ready for the show the next day. I think that's the last time I ever saw one, playing my game on the floor the next day."

Panasonic's ill-fated computer indeed disappeared quicker than a gambler's stake, so Bob returned to the Apple and collaborated with the aptly named Art Huff, who created the graphics and game design for *Space Ark* while Bob coded the engine. The planet-hopping adventure revealed that he could handle some clever 3D effects, but the project also made him realise he was less in control of aspects off screen.

"I was getting myself into trouble with some things I shouldn't have been doing," he snorts. "*Space Ark* was my last project out of my apartment. I was living somewhere in the San Fernando Valley and I got an advance on the product. It took me ten months, but I only really worked for the last two. I was into some stuff… but I got myself cleaned up and decided I needed a full-time job. I just didn't have the willpower to work on my own."

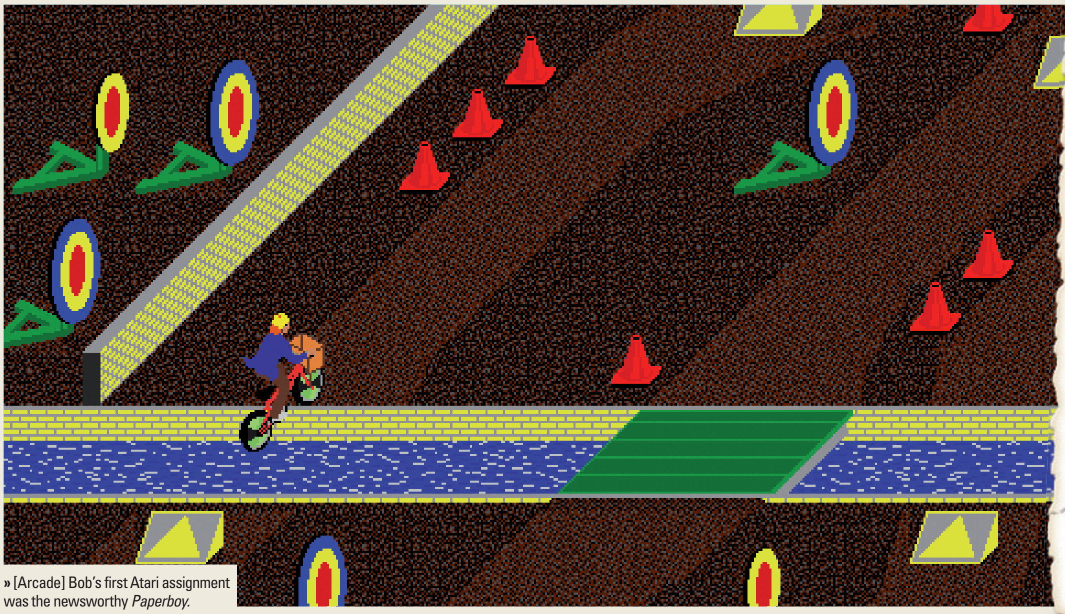
Bob duly landed a job at Atari, thus making him probably the only person to join a company renowned for Bacchanalian excess as a form of rehab. His role was as a software engineer, working under a lead game designer and tasked with coding specific gameplay elements. The first project thrown his way was *Paperboy*, where he implemented all the mechanisms to make it a two-player game, before being teamed up with precocious designer Mark Cerny.

"We had this idea of a game based on *Thriller*, which is one of my favourite albums," enthuses Bob. "You had to

Bob in 1980. This fresh face had already produced a pair of Apple games



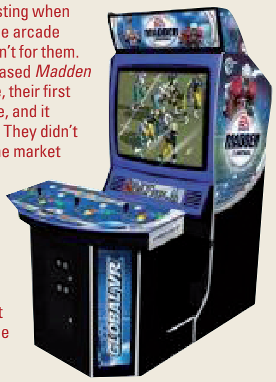
» [Arcade] Bob's first Atari assignment was the newsworthy *Paperboy.*



EA No Way

The arcade industry proves too much for Electronic Arts

Electronic Arts has been a major force in the home videogames market for decades, but in the mid-Nineties it made a play for the arcades, too. Bob was recruited to its new division and began work on an ambitious future sports game. "*Hover Traxx* was probably the biggest heartbreak of my career," he sighs. "The design was based on hover boards. You'd fly down tracks, which were like a cross between a half-pipe and a roller coaster. There was kind of a goal that rose from the track and you'd have multiple players all jostling for position. It had a single puck you'd capture under your board and you would shoot to try and score, kind of a cross between basketball, hockey and skateboarding. It was awesome. We had prototypes running on 3DO hardware and just got our first custom hardware. We were a month away from testing when EA decided the arcade business wasn't for them. They had released *Madden* for the arcade, their first and only game, and it didn't do well. They didn't understand the market and they were right. They were smart and knew what they should and shouldn't be doing. That didn't make the emotion any less for me."



control Michael and walk around scenes from the video, like a darkly lit town and a graveyard with bodies rising from the graves. We had a full game idea all worked out, but Michael Jackson didn't want anything more to do with *Thriller,* probably because he was getting negative publicity due to its gross nature, I guess. His people said he wanted nothing to do with a videogame."

So the game died a death but the pair stayed together and began work on one of Mark's other ideas. After ten months and many all-night programming sessions, *Marble Madness* was released in late-1984. It was Bob's first experience of programming in C and the custom hardware and complicated ball physics was undoubtedly a challenge, as was working with the temperamental Cerny.

"Mark is a genius – exceptionally smart with very creative juices flowing," says Bob, "but he is difficult to work with. I'm pretty sure after *Marble Madness*, I didn't want to work with him for a while. Some years later, I did work with him again and he was just as difficult, but I still enjoyed working with him. How do you quantify that? He does come across as arrogant, but, you know, I think he probably has a right to be."

Bob's next lead designer couldn't have been more different. He came under the tutelage of Atari golden boy Ed Logg, creator of *Asteroids* and *Centipede*, who was working on a four-player fighting fantasy game that was to prove a high point of Bob's career.

"With *Gauntlet* I was able to be more creative," beams Bob. "For *Marble Madness*, Mark had everything pretty much laid out. Ed had a good picture of the moment-to-moment gameplay, but the full scope of the game wasn't decided. Ed has the smallest ego of anyone I've ever seen and yet he's definitely brilliant. I have the utmost respect for him and I still think of him as my mentor. He taught me so much – and not just about videogames. He taught me about the arcade market and what the player wanted, why a game would do well and why it wouldn't, what it means to put together 30 seconds of gameplay. If someone can have fun in 30 seconds, you've got them. For *Gauntlet*, he knew up front what the core pieces were, but he didn't have the whole thing, so I could help develop features and some of the characters – the lobbers, the thief and how all the audio triggers could antagonise or help the player."

Yes, Bob is the voice behind the immortal lines 'Don't shoot food' and 'Valkyrie is about to die', his clever coding deciding when to call the audio routines that add so much to *Gauntlet's* atmosphere. It's that relationship between hard code and player experience that is at the heart of the software engineer's role, as Bob explains: "I've always been a facilitator. I've enjoyed contributing to game ideas and I think every project I've worked on I've contributed to in some small way – *Gauntlet* more than any other as the opportunity was there. Mostly, though, I've been the guy who makes sure the designer, the artist and the audio people get what they want to come to life." Which makes it all sound rather magical, doesn't it? Bob continued to be Sorcerer Logg's apprentice for *Gauntlet II* and *Xybots*, which began life as *Gauntlet III* before a change in art direction took the ambitious 3D corridor blaster into space. However, not all of their collaborations were as successful as their opening trio. Some never made it into the arcades at all.

"Ed and I worked on a *Warlords* remake," Bob recalls of their revisiting of Atari's 'Pong to the death' coin-op from

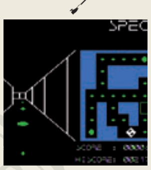
Trivia

Bob worked with Ed Logg on *Xybots*, released by Atari in 1987. It features tooled-up space marines bounding down 3D corridors and blasting aliens, six years before *Doom* had a crack at it.

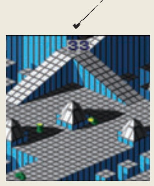
Timeline

1982 | 1984 | 1985 | 1990

SPECTRE
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **VERSION:** Apple II
One of Bob's early Apple games, this combined a 2D map with a 3D maze and a smattering of Pac-Man. Well worth a look.



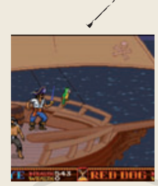
MARBLE MADNESS
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
This innovative roll-'em-up saw Bob working with the 'talented but difficult' Mark Cerny. The end result is a true classic.



GAUNTLET
■ **YEAR:** 1985
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Bob's very first game with the talented Ed Logg was multiplayer magic. Just remember, whatever you do don't shoot food…



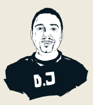
SKULL & CROSSBONES
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
This was Bob's very first arcade game as lead designer. Sadly, the end result didn't quite turn out the way he had hoped.



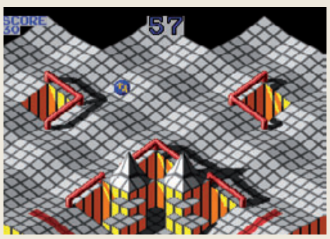
The Team On Flanagan

Here's what **Retro Gamer** have to say about Bob's games...





Poor old Bob. He's been involved in some truly wonderful videogames over the years, and yet he's rarely acknowledged when they're discussed. Hopefully this article will go some way towards addressing this oversight. Out of all the games he's been involved with, it's *Xybots* that I enjoy the most. It's a natural evolution of *Gauntlet* and plays brilliantly.





Game designers usually get all the kudos for creating the classics, but without software engineers like Bob, those ideas might never have lit up our screens and hearts in the first place. He's had a hand in such memorable Atari titles as *Gauntlet* and *Marble Madness* and he's still weaving his magic behind the scenes in the industry today. Respect due.





Of all the games that Bob has been involved with, it's *Gauntlet* that I keep going back to. Yes it's as repetitive as hell, but it also has an incredible allure that I still find compelling. There's something terribly exciting about watching your health time run down and seeing the screen fill with an ever-alarming selection of monsters as you battle through with three other players.

1980. "We were thinking of a way to retrofit *Gauntlet* so operators could make more money from the cab they'd bought. It was four-player and had whirl-y-gigs instead of balls. We spent a month or two creating a prototype that sat in the play area at Atari. It was fun and all the engineers liked it, but I don't think Ed believed it had a market. It just didn't have the legs to make it in the arcade."

Things were indeed changing in the videogame world. The rise of the NES meant the home market was increasingly important, which helps explain why in 1988 Bob popped over to Atari's home division, Tengen, to work on the conversion of the mighty *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* for Nintendo's all-conquering breeze block.

"It was like going home, which was great," laughs Bob. "Working on a simple machine with limited capabilities made it easy to define what you were going to do, like I had done on the Apple II. With the arcade work up to that point, almost every game was a different hardware and you had to learn it and help the hardware engineers get it fixed and develop new systems to run the game… I was pleased to have a break from that."

The project was helped by the involvement of both Peter Lipson, who had been the software engineer on the original arcade game, and the hugely experienced Mike Hally, responsible for *Star Wars*, *Gravitar* and countless others. The experience certainly prepared Bob to do a similar console conversion of the 1990 scrolling swashbuckler *Skull & Crossbones*… except this time, he'd been the designer of the arcade game, his first as the lead.

"I'd been working with Ed so long and he pushed me out of the tree… and I didn't exactly fly. I landed, splat, on the ground. My design was too complex for the market. I was seeing Errol Flynn in the background like in all those old movies, running around a castle, the swordplay, the props… I had this really good sword-fighting engine where the enemy could defend and attack and learn from you. But the players really didn't want to think; they wanted to button mash. *Double Dragon* was out, *Street Fighter* was out… I was trying to do some finesse. I had to dumb down the AI and that took away a lot from the moment-to-moment gameplay."

Bob still cites *Skull & Crossbones* as a valuable experience and the game certainly contained some interesting technical challenges – see the motion-captured skeleton enemy, which can detect if you've clobbered its knee-joint or cleaved its skull – but the game didn't deliver the booty for Atari and caused Bob to question his new position. "I was excited about doing my own game, but also reticent and unsure of myself," he

> "I've always been a facilitator. I enjoy contributing to ideas"
>
> *Bob on the alchemy of the software engineer*



Flanagan On Flanagan

We asked Bob to identify the three favourite titles from his illustrious back catalogue



■ MARBLE MADNESS

My first complete arcade game and my first shot at the 68000 CPU, which offered more power than the 6502. I worked with a 'real' 3D physics model for the motion of the marble and create a simple interpreted scripting language for the enemies. Expectations were high because Mark Cerny was lead.



■ GAUNTLET

The first game with my soon-to-be mentor Ed Logg. I learned about the players, the market and the importance of moment-to-moment gameplay. I had a lot of creative development room for the maze editor, the development of the thief, the title, the audio AI, the first time help and the lobbers.



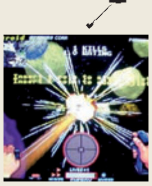
■ DR MUTO

After many years, I got to work with Ed Logg again. I met several people that impacted on my life: Dave O'Riva influenced my opinion on software architecture and where the split between game and engine is, and Scot Amos, the best producer to work for, taught me how to work in a big team.



Bob and his dad make their own entertainment in the days before videogames

1992



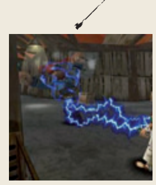
SPACE LORDS
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
This first-person space shooter featured fancy rendered graphics and a hefty arcade cabinet, making it stand out in arcades.

1999



HYDRO THUNDER
■ **YEAR:** 1999
■ **VERSION:** PSone
This powerboat racing title rode the surf from arcade to home consoles. The Dreamcast outing was particularly impressive.

2002



DR MUTO
■ **YEAR:** 2002
■ **VERSION:** PS2
Mad scientist morphs into flying squirrel in this sprightly platformer. It's harmless fun, but there are far better examples of the genre.

2008



SIMANIMALS
■ **YEAR:** 2008
■ **VERSION:** Wii
Feed the birds and the bears in this wildlife-loving spin on the *Sims* franchise. We've become rather obsessed with the Wii version.

Readers' Questions

■ **RetroKingSimon:** Which game did you enjoy working on the most and which was the most hassle?
Marble Madness was the most enjoyable. Most hassle? Boy, probably _Marble Madness 2_, which is interesting now I think about it. Was that my fault? Yeah, I think it probably was.

■ **Merman:** Did you get 'hands on' with the actual electronics of your arcade games?
No, luckily we had technicians for that. Early in my career I was always blaming hardware guys for problems until I was embarrassed enough times to check for software problems first.

■ **NonShinyGoose:** During the development of *The Urbz*, did you ever stop and think to yourself 'What the hell is all this about?!'
[Laughs] No, I was just happy the Black-Eyed Peas were there.

■ **Northway:** What do you think of the change in going from 2D to 3D?
The transition was definitely problematic. People have much more difficulty in understanding 3D. I think you still get that today. Even first-person shooters in arcades are kind of two-and-a-half-D. You know, I don't think the transition has been done yet. We're still working on it.

■ **JetSetWilly:** Did Lucasfilm help you out in any way with props, set designs, story boards and so on for *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*?
Lucas was pretty involved in the arcade one, mainly to make sure it didn't hurt their IP. They weren't so involved with the home version as we were really working from the arcade one, but we did get a tour of the Lucas ranch. We got to see the private theatre and the firehouse, which was fun.

■ **The Loafer:** What did you find most challenging about writing games on the Apple II? Were you ever tempted to move to the dark – C64 – side?
Making the complex graphics fast. The way the bitmap hardware worked, getting things to move fast and maintain colour – they had a tendency to change colour as they moved. Programma and Datamost both produced C64 products, but I wasn't enticed, because of the character-based graphics. The C64 was never interesting to me as I didn't have enough control.

■ **Uglifruit:** Given *Marble Madness* was famously programmed in 'C' rather than low-level Assembly, do you personally feel responsible for the now ubiquitous reliance on middleware?
[Laughs] Actually I think we were told to do it that way. Or maybe it was available… the 68000 processor had a C compiler and we could work in C, which would be a lot better than doing it in Assembly language. They'd done enough performance evaluation to say it'd probably be okay, though we ended up doing a lot of optimisation.

■ **The Master:** Who is your favourite Dr Who?
Tom Baker. I was definitely into Dr Who and I still am.

» [Arcade] The unreleased *Marble Madness 2: Marble Man.*





» [Apple II] Ghosts and gobbling in *Spectre*, one of Bob's early Apple games.





» [NES] The NES conversion of *Indiana Jones* was a valiant effort to squeeze the huge arcade game into a small grey box.

sighs. "I thought I had a handle on it. I genuinely believed I had a great idea for a swashbuckling game but then found out halfway through that wasn't what the players wanted and became disillusioned and frustrated. I realised I wasn't going to be a designer of games…"

His voice trails off. Bob did have one more crack as the lead, co-designing a follow-up to *Marble Madness*, but sadly *Marble Man* never made it to market (you can read the full story of what happened in **RG** 55). Thus Bob returned to his supporting role and with Ed Logg again at the helm, he used Pixar's groundbreaking RenderMan software to create the hundreds of views of each of the in-game spaceships for *Space Lords* (1992). These were exciting technological times and recognising Atari didn't have its own 3D texture-mapping hardware, he teamed up with like-minded colleagues to put that right, under the codename Project Zoid.

"*Hard Drivin'* used flat polygons and the group that developed it didn't see that as an issue," explains Bob. "I did and so did others, so we got together and spent six months developing 3D hardware, using a custom chip we'd created that was replicated ten times on the board. Around 1993, we got a texture-mapped cube spinning on a string, which is the traditional test for 3D. That was the last thing I did at Atari…"

Disappointed by the lack of marketing support, Bob was tempted away from Atari by EA, which was in the process of setting up its own coin-op division. He launched himself enthusiastically into *Hover Traxx*, a futuristic racer-cum-extreme sports title, but despite the game being a month away from field-testing, it never made it to the arcade due to EA's abrupt withdrawal from the sector (see EA No Way).

Undeterred, Bob formed Blue Shift Inc with a group of industry veterans and produced *Vapor TRX*, a combative hover-racing arcade game, before moving into the console market and releasing *Hydro Thunder* and TJ Lavin's *Ultimate BMX*, both for the PlayStation.

> "Jackson didn't want anything to do with [a game]" *The King of Pop halts development on a potential graveyard hit*

"We tried to build newer, better games," says Bob of his five and a half years at Blue Shift. "I thought we'd worked our buns off on those products, especially *Hydro Thunder*, but they didn't do that well. It was too much work for too little return. I became a dad for the first time in 1998 and I just couldn't continue to work seven days a week to develop the company." So, rather aptly, Bob again joined his own spiritual father Ed Logg at Midway to work on *Dr Muto*. The experience of working in a large development team lead to a fortuitous introduction to Maxis, which was looking to convert its hugely successful PC franchise *The Sims* to consoles.

"That was luck, luck, luck," laughs Bob. "When the Midway office was shutting down, our producer Scot Amos ensured we all had jobs. Maxis had no console experience so a group of us joined them to work on *The Sims Bustin' Out*."

And Bob's still with that team. His latest shipped title was 2008's *SimAnimals* for the Wii and even after three decades in the business, his enthusiasm remains undiminished. "Oh yeah, I'm still passionate about making games," he smiles. "There's nothing better than telling someone you meet what you do for a living. They're, like, 'Wow, that's great. What games have you made?' The fact that I've been lucky enough to have worked on some of the games I have… it's a very fulfilling, good feeling."

The feeling's good all round, Bob.

Bob Flanagan's

Desert Island Disks

The games that Bob just couldn't live without and why he loves them

01 Space Eggs APPLE II

One of the most addictive, fun, and challenging arcade-style games I ever played on the Apple II. I spent many late-night hours trying to best this game and could still spend hours playing it.

02 Mario Bros NES

Before we had kids, my wife and I used to go over to our best friends Carol and Jerry's house. The girls would end up drinking and talking and the guys would end up playing this game into the wee hours while drinking scotch. I miss those nights, and as long as there is scotch on the island, *Mario Bros* should be there with me as well.

03 Warcraft I, II, III MAC

I simply found the *Warcraft* series to be one of the best-developed moment-to-moment gameplay offerings. The tuning was way too hard on the first *Warcraft*, just right on the second, and too hard on the third. Still, I could spend hours playing these games with the story levels and all the custom levels that people built.

04 Spore MAC

Simply never-ending fun. You can play over and over and never really see the same responses or creatures. My two boys became as addicted to this game as I did. I would love to spend days just playing and learning more about this game.

05 The Sims 3 MAC

I worked on *The Sims 3* for 11 months and shipped three *Sims* console products. I've fallen in love with the gameplay in *The Sims* line of products. *The Sims 3* has more emergent gameplay than any ever developed. I'd love to be able to spend days creating Sims, developing their lives, making them rich, and having them do all the things I will never be able to do.

06 Marble Madness ARCADE

Okay, so I programmed this, but so what? I still love to play *Marble Madness* and could play it over and over still trying to get the best time through the six levels. There always seems to be a way to get better.

07 Gauntlet II ARCADE

I like *Gauntlet* first because four people can play together and my kids love this game. Also, *Gauntlet II* over *Gauntlet* because there were so many new cool gadgets that could keep you occupied for so much longer like the transporters, destructible walls, the dragon and the secret walls. I still seem to be able to play it for hours.

08 Boom Blox WII

Another multiplayer game. I really enjoy playing this game with my kids because they think they have it nailed, and I can still beat them at it. So, as long as this desert island thing happens before they start whipping me, this would be one to have on the island.



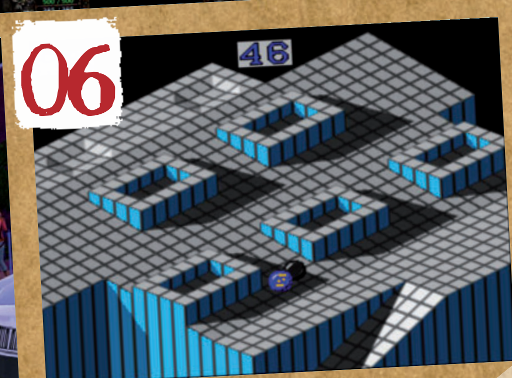
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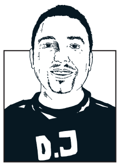

08

MOVIE

MORE THAN JUST A GAME



- **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

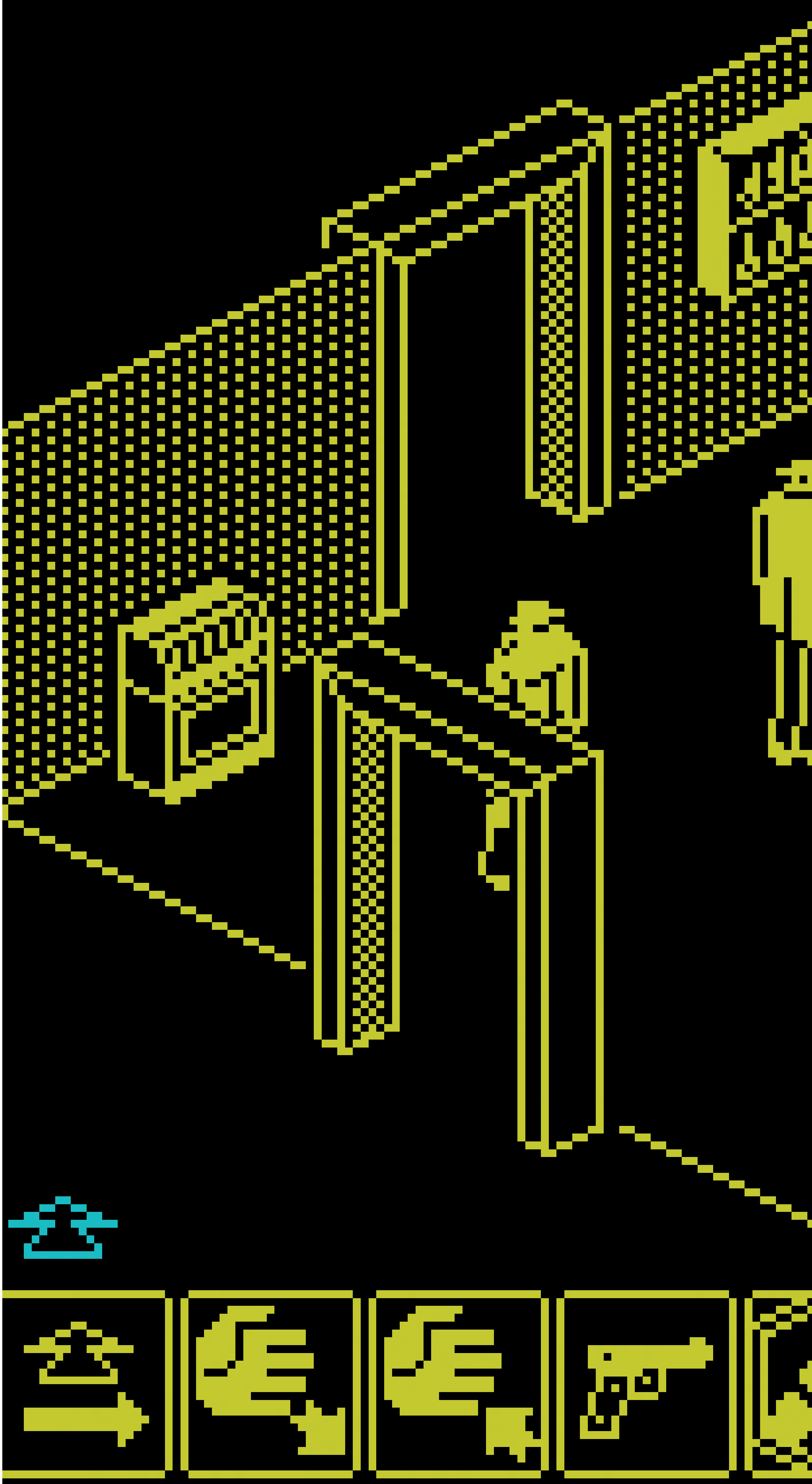
If you thought Ultimate was the master of the isometric adventure, you may be interested in checking out the work of a certain Dusko Dimitrijevic. His games might not be as well known as those of the Twyford-based developer, but he certainly knew how to shift a set of sprites around, as his isometric debut Movie proves.

Taking its inspiration from the classic gumshoe flicks of the Hollywood golden age, *Movie*'s beautifully detailed sprites still manage to impress a good 23 years after the title first wowed reviewers. Like Ultimate's games, many of the on-screen items can be moved around and interacted with, but the detail of *Movie* goes that little bit further by featuring everything from ticking clocks to moving tape reels. *Movie* is filled with little touches like this and they add immeasurably to the overall experience.

There's more to Dimitrijevic's title than pretty visuals, however, and *Movie* proves itself to be a compelling game that constantly draws you in to its complex plot, involving espionage, identical dames and every gangster cliché you can think of. Yes, there's nothing here that you haven't seen in a dozen episodes of *Columbo* or any piece of film noir, but Dimitrijevic nevertheless does a fantastic job with the resources available.

Sure, the game has its niggles – moving around is just as slow and cumbersome now as it was back in 1986 – but the intuitive icon-driven menus, brilliantly structured maps and host of tasks to accomplish, more than make up for *Movie*'s little foibles.

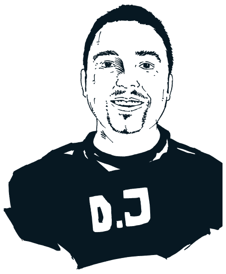
The specialist press of the time could see that *Movie* was something special, with the Spectrum effort receiving excellent scores and the highest accolades from the likes of *Crash*, *C&VG*, *Your Sinclair* and *Sinclair User*. It's something of a pity, then, that Dimitrijevic's follow-up, the superhero-themed *Phantom Club,* wasn't up to scratch.





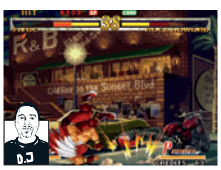
RETRORATED

» GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES



» The summer months are usually a slow time for games, with few big names getting released. Someone forgot to tell Microsoft this, though, as its recent Live Arcade output has been absolutely stunning.

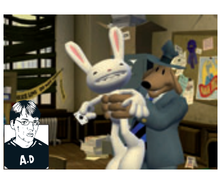
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Garou: Mark Of The Wolves
One of the greatest 2D fighting games of all time for just £6? Hell yes!



STUART
Garou: Mark Of The Wolves
Garou is a sensational fighter and now I can beat Darran from the comfort of my house.



ASHLEY
Sam & Max Save The World
Like the videogame equivalent of a sitcom, I'm tuning into this one every week.

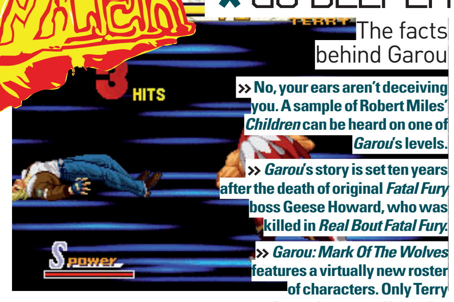
XBLA



» [Live Arcade] Rock is seen by many as being a little overpowered. They couldn't be more wrong.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Garou



» No, your ears aren't deceiving you. A sample of Robert Miles' *Children* can be heard on one of *Garou's* levels.

» *Garou's* story is set ten years after the death of original *Fatal Fury* boss Geese Howard, who was killed in *Real Bout Fatal Fury*.

» *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* features a virtually new roster of characters. Only Terry Bogard appeared in earlier *Fatal Fury* games.



Garou: Mark Of The Wolves

THERE'S A NEW KING OF FIGHTERS IN TOWN

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SNK PLAYMORE
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Fatal Fury* game featured just three fighters and was released in arcades in 1991. Despite lacking the complexity and accessibility of *Street Fighter II*, it has nevertheless built up a core following, with *Garou* being not only the best game in the franchise but also its last.

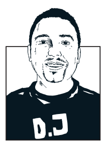
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
FATAL FURY (NEO GEO)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
STREET FIGHTER III (ARCADE)





Regular readers will know that we have a special place in our hearts for *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, as we do our best to sneak it into the magazine at every possible opportunity. Of course, there's a damned good reason for this, and it's that it's easily the best 2D brawler that doesn't have the words 'Fighter', 'Strike', 'Street' or '3rd' in the title. Due to the expense of the original AES game and the Dreamcast and PS2 conversions never receiving a PAL release, not everyone has been able to discover the brilliance of SNK's beautiful fighter.

Thankfully, this Xbox Live Arcade conversion should rectify all this and bring this superb game to a far wider audience, as, aside from the odd laggy match, this is an absolutely tremendous effort that appears identical to the MVS original and proves that it's not just Capcom that knows how to make tremendous fighters.

Indeed, the more you play *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, the more you realise just what an amazing job SNK did in its development. The most impressive aspect is just how finely tuned and balanced the available fighters are. Granted, you're not getting a massive roster of pugilists, but those on offer are full of character, will take you an age to master, and will never feel overpowered like certain fighters in *3rd Strike*.

Gameplay is also fantastic, with the Just Defend and TOP mechanic adding plenty of depth for the hardcore players but being easy enough to understand that even total noobs can start pulling them off consistently.

Add in some truly stunning animation – and a filter than can, thankfully, be turned off – and a selection of marvellous tunes and *Mark Of The Wolves* is a game that looks and sounds as good as it plays. Yes, the netcode has had certain owners up in arms due to its intermittent lag, but this is still an amazing effort for just 800 Points.

OPINION



The best 2D fighter – in my opinion, of course – finally arrives on Live, and the wait has been worth it. This is an impressive port that ticks all boxes, and the online versus, though prone to lag, is the icing on the cake. It's a real must-own for fight fans. Now bring on *King Of Fighters XII*!

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

Gorgeous and backed up by some amazing gameplay, *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* loses out slightly to *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* due to its inconsistent online matches.

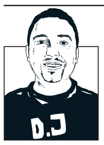
» Scores

Presentation	55%
Graphics	94%
Sound	92%
Playability	96%
Addictivity	94%
Overall	**94%**

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

PITFALL HARRY GOES 16-BIT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



With Nintendo now seemingly focusing on its WiiWare service, the number of weekly Virtual Console releases is really starting to dwindle. This is a pity, as releases like *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* still prove that there are plenty of great games to discover on the download service.

Indeed, the first thing that strikes you about *The Mayan Adventure* is just how amazingly polished it still is. Releasing the inferior – as far as sound goes – Mega Drive version instead of the SNES game seems like a bit of an oversight, but in terms of platforming fun, *The Mayan Adventure* remains a fantastic romp and is a pleasant change from all the shooters that have been cropping up on the service lately.

Visually it's absolutely fantastic, with Pitfall Harry and the rest of the jungle inhabitants featuring the same sort of super-slick animation and polish that wouldn't look out of place in a Shiny release. Then there's the fact that it's all tied together with some inventive level design that not only cleverly references the Atari 2600 original – which is locked away if you can find it – but also greatly expands on what had previously wowed gamers 12 years earlier.

With so many of the familiar *Mario* games available on the Wii's Virtual Console, it's refreshing to see a company brave enough to release an alternative platformer, and while it's not a patch on the likes of *Super Mario World*, *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* is nevertheless still great fun.

» Scores

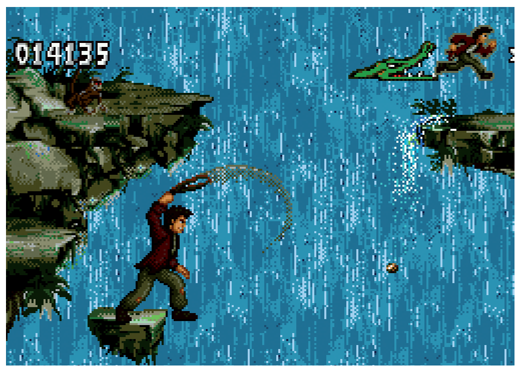
Presentation	74%
Graphics	88%
Sound	60%
Playability	74%
Addictivity	78%

Overall 76%

VC



» [VC] *Pitfall* is amazingly slick, with the kind of polish you'd expect from a Dave Perry game.



OPINION



I've always had a soft spot for *The Mayan Adventure*, even if it does churn out the same boss over and over again. The animation is top notch, there are plenty of secrets to discover, and it even features the original game. Not bad at all for the asking price.

Stuart Hunt

XBLA



Shinobi

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 400 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **Ah, *Shinobi*. We** love you so much. Yes, you're nothing more than *Rolling Thunder* crossed with an assortment of ninjas, but your cool bosses, slick gameplay and excellent bonus round mean that it's no bad thing and we still find ourselves coming back to you.

Yes, *Shinobi*'s back and it's still as good as ever. The fact that it's only a few quid makes it even sweeter.

» Score **89%**

Wii



Bubble Bobble Plus

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» ***Bubble Bobble* is** one of Taito's best-known franchises, and this reboot does it proud. Featuring both the original and a new arranged mode, this is a tremendous release that proves that sometimes old games really are the best. We'd have been happy with just the arcade game, so kudos to Taito for including some great extras.

» Score **93%**

PSN



Zuma

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £6.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1+

» **Regardless of whether** you feel *Zuma* plagiarises Mitchell's 1998 release *Puzz Loop*, there's no denying it's a wonderful little game. With its South American theme, relaxing music and fiendishly designed levels, *Zuma* is an excellent puzzler that's worryingly addictive. The price is rather high and the difficulty spikes are a little uneven in places, but apart from that *Zuma* is pure puzzling gold.

» Score **77%**

iPhone



Marble Blast Ultra

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** 400 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» ***Marble Blast* has** appeared on a variety of different systems over the years and it's always been a blast (sorry) to play. Unfortunately, this iPhone iteration is nowhere near the usual high standard, and while Garage Games should be commended for including a variety of wireless four-player maps across which to run rampant, the game itself is just far too fiddly on Apple's platform.

» Score **43%**

» THE SIMS 3

The Sims 3

WILL WRIGHT'S CREATIONS HAVE THE TOUCH

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £5.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1

iPhone



» [iPhone] One of the most addictive time sinks around. Curse the iPod Touch's short battery life.

D.J

EA's had a pretty good run since it started making games on Apple's iPhone. Granted, its prices are extremely steep compared to its competitors, but many of its conversions have been incredibly polished and worthy of that high price tag. *The Sims 3* is no different, and although it plays more like *The Sims 2* instead of its recently released PC peer, it's nevertheless an excellent addition to the decade-long franchise and has been tweaked for the iPhone.

While there are plenty of options when creating your Sim, as well as giving it one of six different personas, the real joy comes from constantly interacting with your created Sim and serving his every whim. Feeding, cooking, getting a job, watching TV, chatting to other Sims – it's all business as usual. However, it's been enhanced by the new wishes that



your digital avatar will routinely ask for and that selection of mini-games – of which fishing is easily the most fun – in which you can now take part.

You won't find anything new here, but what's impressive is how well EA has structured the game to work on a handheld. Of course, this in itself is nothing new, with both the GBA and the DS receiving numerous versions over the years, but they were never quite as in-depth as this latest offering. A superb game that should keep you going forever. Or at least until the next one comes out.

OPINION

S.H

It's a bit annoying that the game's Build mode is nowhere near as immersive as previous games, but this remains an amazing effort when you look at what it's actually doing on a phone. Fans of the franchise will be perfectly happy with this excellent portable effort.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	85%
Sound	77%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	93%

Overall 91%

XBLA



» [Live Arcade] If you don't like the new visuals then pressing Back will take you to the original graphics.

The Secret Of Monkey Island: SE

A GAME WITH REAL MONKEY MAGIC (SORRY)

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC, iPHONE » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1

D.J

After nearly a decade of absence, Guybrush Threepwood makes his triumphant return. We're still waiting for the first part of his new episodic adventure, but this dazzling retelling of his original quest makes the wait that little more bearable. Witty, clever and full of utterly charming characters, we'll stand on the line and pronounce this latest effort to be the best conversion of the game yet.

This is mainly down to the brilliant voice acting that brings Threepwood and the rest of Melee Island to life in a way that the original razor-sharp script never quite managed. Dominic Armato returns to the role he first played in *The Curse Of Monkey Island* and does an absolutely fantastic job, ably backed by Earl Boen returning as LeChuck and Alexandra Boyd as Elaine.

To match the sterling voice work is a brand new context-sensitive interface, some impressive hi-res



sprites – currently dividing the **Retro Gamer** team's opinions – and the option to segue seamlessly into the original PC version, complete with original interface.

We were expecting great things with this port and LucasArts hasn't disappointed. It suffers from the same problem as *Broken Sword*, in that it's instantly familiar to anyone who completed it the first time around, and, like *Sam & Max*, it's let down by the 360's pad, but it remains an utterly charming game that, like a fine wine, simply gets better with age.

OPINION

A.D

I'm a huge, huge fan of the original *Monkey Island*, but this "special edition" is a little bit ropey. The new backgrounds are good, but the characters look awful. Voices are great, but why can't I use them with the classic visuals? It's still just as funny, though…

Ashley Day

» Scores

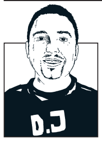
Presentation	92%
Graphics	85%
Sound	90%
Playability	97%
Addictivity	95%

Overall 94%

Gradius Rebirth

KONAMI GOES BACK TO BASICS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WIIWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 600 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



Now, this is a pleasant surprise. *Gradius Rebirth* is a good 400 Points cheaper than its Japanese counterpart, meaning you can get this ridiculously hardcore blaster for the equivalent of around four English pounds. It's a resoundingly solid effort from Konami as well, and while it doesn't break the mould, instead content to cover the same old ground, it remains a great blaster that cleverly mixes elements of the original arcade and MSX games and offers plenty for shmup fans to sink their teeth into.

As with *Mega Man 9*, *Gradius Rebirth* appears to have been made in the late Eighties, with an 8-bit/16-bit styling that immediately makes it stand apart from the vast majority of other WiiWare games. Music is also resoundingly old school, with plenty of raucous sound effects and punchy tunes to make you feel like you're back in the smoke-filled arcades of your youth. To further the trip down Memory Lane are a variety of stages, bosses and moments that fans of the series will instantly recognise. It's great fan service by Konami, and we can't wait to see what it does with the incoming *Contra Rebirth*.

To add to a package that's already great value for money, Konami has included online leaderboards, a score-attack mode and a handy replay option, therefore ensuring that there's plenty of reasons for going back and perfecting your score. There's certainly nothing new on offer here, but for the price it's an absolute bargain. Let's hope other developers follow Konami and Capcom's lead and release similar efforts.

» Scores

Presentation	72%
Graphics	84%
Sound	81%
Playability	75%
Addictivity	78%
Overall	**78%**



» [WiiWare] No, it's not *Salamander*, but it's an easy mistake to make, so we'll let you off. Just this once.



OPINION



It borrows heavily from past games, but unlike *Resident Evil Archives*, *Gradius Rebirth* still manages to feel fresh and exciting. The difficulty is likely to put some off, but if you're looking for a challenge, *Rebirth* will be right up your street.

Stuart Hunt

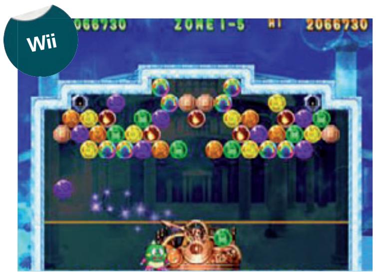


Golden Axe

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Why can't Sega** get its iPhone emulation right in its ports? This is another classic Mega Drive port let down by shonky emulation and sticky touch controls that never manage to feel right. It's not quite as disappointing as last month's *Sonic The Hedgehog* iPhone release due to it being far less choppy, but this is still a huge disappointment. Let's hope this gets sorted out, and quickly.

» Score **65%**



Puzzle Bobble Plus

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **Another Taito classic** game gets revitalised on the Wii. While this is a far better effort than the *Rainbow Islands* reboot, *Puzzle Bobble Plus* suffers due to Taito's decision to add some new blocks that make certain levels frustrating. The battle mode is fun and the core mechanics are still superb, but the changes hamper it.

» Score **70%**



Trivial Pursuit

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **After being bored** silly by the 360 and PS3 version of *Trivial Pursuit*, we've found the iPhone version to be a massive improvement. There's a variety of different gameplay modes, a huge volume of questions to work your way through, and a selection of solid multiplayer modes. All in all, it's an excellent quiz game that's perfect for quick bouts of short play and the portable format it now finds itself on.

» Score **80%**



Doom: Resurrection

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £5.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **John Carmack certainly** knows how to get the best from the iPhone. *Doom: Resurrection* is a gorgeous on-rails shooter that really looks fantastic. It plays a mean game as well, and while it feels a little simplistic in places, the action comes thick and fast. Tight, responsive controls and a nutty story make up for the rather hefty price tag.

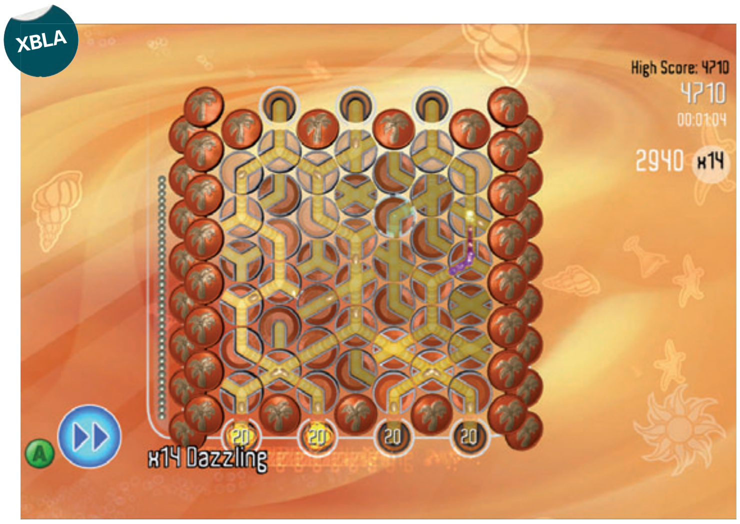
» Score **75%**

Droplitz

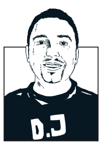
ADDICTION HAS A NEW NAME

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBLA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN, PC, iPHONE » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** ATLUS » **DEVELOPER:** BLITZ ARCADE » **PLAYERS:** 1

XBLA



» [Live Arcade] In style and concept it reminds us slightly of *Wetrix*, but it plays very differently.



Some puzzle games instantly ensare you, ensuring you never escape from their vice-like grip. The wonderful *Droplitz* is one such game. As with the very best puzzle games, *Droplitz*'s concept is simplicity itself: droplets of water fall ever downwards and you must manipulate a selection of differently shaped dials in order to safely funnel them to the collectors at the bottom of each board.

Every time you create a successful path you'll increase your multiplier, and the background music, which is excellent throughout, will subtly change. Once a path has been created and the used dials replaced, the potential to increase your multiplier with the new dials and greatly improve the background beats becomes a worrying yet satisfying obsession.

Initially the board you start off on is very simplistic, with two droppers at the top and three collectors at the bottom, but you'll slowly unlock more complex layouts that will constantly test both your sanity and your reflexes.



Additional modes are also included that introduce a selection of power-ups, infected dials that are slower to turn and will eventually infect accompanying dials, and the serene Zendurance mode, which lets you play until you run out of droplitz.

The lack of any multiplayer disappoints, but this is still the best new puzzler we've played in years. Quite simply essential.

OPINION



Droplitz may well borrow its ideas from other games, but it's all been put together with so much skill and polish that it's impossible to not be impressed. Meticulously crafted and with some truly soothing tunes, *Droplitz* is the best puzzler Xbox Live Arcade has ever seen. Brilliant.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	92%
Graphics	55%
Sound	95%
Playability	96%
Addictivity	98%

Overall 96%

Wii



» [Wii] That's one hell of a spider. Where's John Goodman when you need him?

Resident Evil Archives

NOT SO MUCH ARCHIVE AS ARCHAIC

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £19.99 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



As excellent as *Resident Evil Archives* is, it's incredibly hard to recommend. It features incredible visuals, is an update of one of the greatest survival-horror games ever made, and it's even as engrossing now as when it first appeared on the GameCube seven years ago. However, aside from a few control choices, Capcom has done absolutely nothing to it, meaning you may as well pick up the GameCube version that can be found for a quarter of the price.

Considering how much effort Nintendo has put into its new Play It range, it's a pity that Capcom didn't pick up a few pointers, as this is incredibly lazy stuff. A highly polished update of the PlayStation original, *Resident Evil Archives* is still well worth playing if you've never experienced Capcom's game before. The control system feels antiquated – especially next to EA's *Dead Space* – but get past this and you'll find an excellent adventure rife with fantastic set pieces, clever puzzles and exhilarating boss fights, not to mention plenty of slathering zombies.



For all the laziness on Capcom's part, *Archives* remains a thoroughly absorbing experience once you commit yourself to it. There are loads of new rooms and monsters to discover, plenty of cool extras to unlock, and it still looks absolutely glorious. After the excellent Wii port of *Resident Evil 4*, it's a real shame that *Archives* hasn't received the same treatment.

OPINION



It's a bit annoying that this couldn't have been given a proper Wiimake, but let's not forget that this is *Resident Evil*, arguably one of the greatest survival-horror games of all time. It's still amazingly atmospheric, though, and Capcom has at least given it a sensible price point.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

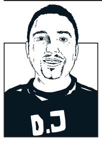
Presentation	80%
Graphics	97%
Sound	85%
Playability	83%
Addictivity	70%

Overall 82%

Sam & Max Save The World

THE DYNAMIC DUO GO HI-DEF

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** WII/PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,600 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** TELLTALE GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



Crikey. Has it really been two and a half years since Sam and Max made their triumphant return to our PC screens? It certainly is, and while PC owners are preparing to enjoy a third season, 360 owners finally get to play one of the finest games of the last decade. Indeed, start playing through this excellent value-for-money pack, which consists of all six episodes, and it's like the dynamic duo never actually went away.

Steve Purcell's creations feel as fresh as ever, while the script itself is brimming with the kind of acerbic and pithy one-liners that LucasArts once seemed to turn out in its sleep. Although the six episodes all feature their own standalone storylines, there is an underlying theme of hypnotism running through the entire season, which allows Purcell and the rest of Telltale Games to have a hell of a lot of fun with proceedings before the story reaches its conclusion.

If *Sam & Max*'s sparkling script immediately takes you back to the good old point-and-click days of yore, then so too will its gameplay – and therein lies this conversion's biggest issue. With the PC originally being entirely mouse-driven, it should come as no surprise to learn that this 360 port does suffer somewhat due to its interface. The 360 pad is a poor substitute for a mouse, making the controls feel sluggish and clunky in places, which does spoil things a little. Look beyond this nuisance, however, and you'll discover one of the funniest games around. Let's hope that *Tales Of Monkey Island* is just as good.

» Scores

Presentation	90%
Graphics	86%
Sound	88%
Playability	86%
Addictivity	87%
Overall	**87%**



» [Live Arcade] Purcell's creations have made the transition to 3D exceedingly well – far better than many other 2D characters.

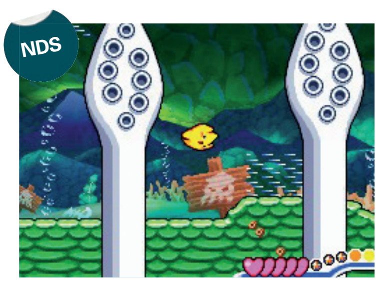


OPINION



People constantly moan about Live Arcade's rising prices, but this one is perfectly justified. You're getting an insane number of guffaws for your cash, and while the controls are a bit twitchy, the characters, story and visuals more than make up for it.

Stuart Hunt



The Legendary Starfy

» **SYSTEM:** NDS
» **PRICE:** $29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **It's taken five** games and seven years for Nintendo's starfish to reach Western shores. Currently confined to the US, this is still worth importing, even if it doesn't offer anything new. There's no denying *Starfy*'s charm, though, and the cute visuals, polished levels and great boss encounters combine into a fun platformer.

» Score **70%**



StoneLoops! Of Jurassica

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** 59 PENCE » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Nice. Two variations** of *Puzz Loop* in the same month. Interestingly, it's *StoneLoops* and not PopCap's *Zuma* that's been getting the most play. The levels feel better designed and there's more variety in the visuals, while the second play mode, Grab 'N' Shoot, is just as much fun as the main game. At 59 pence, it's an absolute steal.

» Score **87%**



Toki Tori

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £1.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Taking inspiration from** games as diverse as *Lemmings* and *Pengo*, *Toki Tori* is a delightful puzzler that has Toki Tori collecting his missing eggs. To make stages easier, you have access to a variety of skills, but be warned: some items can only be used a set number of times. With excellent controls, delightful music and clever levels, *Toki Tori* is essential for those who love puzzle games.

» Score **80%**



Altered Beast

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 400 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **We were a** little too kind on this when we first played it on Sega's recent Mega Drive compilation. While the arcade version is still miles better than the god awful Mega Drive port, it remains a dull, turgid scrolling fighter with little ambition. It's certainly fun to a point and the voices remain hilarious to listen to, but there are far better examples of the genre on Live Arcade already, so play those instead.

» Score **44%**

» MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES

INFORMATION

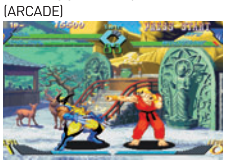
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION 3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £11.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

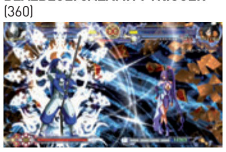
» Capcom began its *Versus* series with *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* in 1996. Owing to the popularity of the cross-over, Capcom followed it up with *Marvel Super Heroes Vs Capcom* in 1997, *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes* the following year, and ended the series with *Marvel Vs Capcom: Age Of Heroes* in 2000.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
BLAZBLUE: CALAMITY TRIGGER (360)



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes

» It represents the fourth and final game in the *Marvel Vs Capcom* series

» This is the only title in the *Versus* series that doesn't feature individual character endings

PS3



» [PS3] Hulk vs Zangief, who will win? Hulk of course – he's twice the size of the bear molester, and a superhero to boot.



» [PS3] Wolverine takes on his arch nemesis, Sabretooth, in a violent and epic battle… set in a fairground.

BEAUTY AND THE GEEK

Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes



The mash up of the Street Fighter and Marvel universes (and therefore the coming together of comic book and videogame fans) was a recipe for success. The chance to see Jill Valentine order a zombie to chew the face off Mega Man was cool on many levels, and understandably, such examples of fan fantasy made into a reality attracted interest not only from the hardcore beat-'em-up crowd, but also plenty of casual gamers.

This month *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, the final Marvel/Capcom cross-over title, arrives on XBLA and PSN. And coming hot on the heels of the excellent *Street Fighter IV*, and *Super Street Fighter II: HD Remix*, it would be fair to say that it's a game with a lot to live up to.

A refining of the Dreamcast port, this latest HD remix from Backbone Entertainment has, thankfully, turned out to be yet another highly impressive high-definition re-release to come charging from the Capcom stable. Boasting crisper visuals, brand new 1080p backdrops, a widescreen mode, plus all 56 characters unlocked from the beginning, we'd go as far as to say that this is the definitive home version of Capcom's epic brawler. It even features online multiplayer, which, sadly, we didn't get the opportunity to test, but we can confidently assume it'll be as solid as *HD Remix*

Of course, with such a ridiculous number of fighters to select from, and the action playing out in three-on-three tag-team matches, *New Age Of Heroes* can feel a shade unbalanced when compared with other fighting games, and the knock-on effect is that it can occasionally cause the difficulty to spike violently depending on which trio of combatants your three fighters happen to be battling against.

In its defence, given the quirky and gimmicky theme of this fighter, it was never destined to be a brawler in the same sense as *Virtua Fighter* or *Garou*. *Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes* is excellent – a wildly addictive, albeit gimmicky brawler that panders brilliantly to its relevant fan bases. And if you want the definitive version of this – probably the most explosive and insane beat-'em-up ever conceived by the human mind – and then consider that the Xbox version fetches prices in the region £20-£30 (although probably not for much longer), you should do yourself a favour and make this your next download.



» [PS3] The fights can get pretty chaotic, as this screen demonstrates perfectly.

OPINION



Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes certainly isn't perfect, but it does have Strider as a playable character. There may be balancing issues, but it's a hell of a lot of fun, and considering the high cost of previous versions, £12 is nothing less than a bargain of gargantuan proportions.

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

The most over the top two-dimensional fighter gets a nice HD respray, and while it's not the most balanced beat-'em-up, it's still a hell of a lot of fun. And with over 50 characters, it certainly offers superb value for its £12 asking price.

» Scores

Presentation	88%
Graphics	90%
Sound	86%
Playability	78%
Addictivity	80%

Overall 86%

» RYGAR: THE BATTLE OF ARGUS



Wii

» [Wii] The Wii Remote comes into play later on in the game, but it should have been used for combat immediately.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Rygar: The Battle Of Argus

» **If you're interested in playing the arcade original, hunt down a copy of *Tecmo Classic Arcade* on Microsoft's Xbox.**

» **Although the NES version is also called *Rygar* it is not a port. It actually plays more like *Metroid*.**

★ WHY NOT TRY

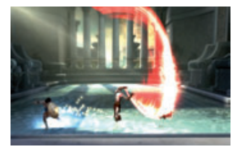
▼ SOMETHING OLD

GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

GOD OF WAR II (PS2)





GOD OF BORE

Rygar: The Battle Of Argus



It's unfortunate for Rygar that we reviewed the wonderful Klonoa just last month, because Namco's reboot is a damn sight better than Tecmo's sorry effort.

It's disappointing, because we really enjoyed the *Rygar* of seven years ago. Sadly, time has not been kind to Tecmo's arcade adventure, and efforts like the spectacular *God Of War* and Tecmo's own *Ninja Gaiden* make this remake look weary by comparison.

Unlike Namco's wonderful reboot of *Klonoa*, Tecmo has done very little to enhance this update. The visuals are rough around the edges; the controls are awkwardly placed and take some getting used to; and the new monsters offer little excitement over the original menagerie. The most worrying aspect of *Rygar,* though, is how rarely the motion control is used. Granted, you eventually pick up weapons that allow for a fair bit of waggling, but this should have been implemented from the very beginning.

Ultimately, the real problem for *Rygar* is that so many better games from the same genre have been released in the time since the original and as a result the gameplay just feels incredibly tired. Most levels are extremely linear and simply require you to constantly travel back and forth in order to open sealed-off areas while the simplistic and lethargic combat controls lack the grace and style of the likes of *Ninja Gaiden* and *God Of War.*

Boss battles are also an issue, with many of them doing absolutely nothing until you've whittled them down to half their health bars, meaning that the majority of fights are just mind-numbingly dull. Then there's the fact that it's all too easy to fall off platforms when making jumps or fighting enemies, which causes no end of frustration – especially when you fall down for the umpteenth time due to no fault of your own. It's incredibly frustrating and serves only to highlight the many gameplay problems that Tecmo didn't bother to rectify for its update.

It's a shame, because the genre itself is woefully represented on the Wii, and *The Battle Of Argus* almost managed to impress in certain areas. However, this is evidence of lazy development, so our advice to you is leave it on the shelf unless you're a truly die-hard fan.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** 3 JULY
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** TECMO
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Rygar* was released in 1986 and took the form of a fast and frantic platformer in the style of *Ghosts 'N' Goblins.* Several ports followed, including an excellent totally new game for the NES, but it would be another 16 years before a proper sequel finally arrived.

OPINION



While I was a fan of the original, this Wii-release just didn't do it for me. *Rygar* may have attractive stages and that nostalgia factor, but when the worlds feel empty and the enemies tired and disinterested it tends to rub off on you. Still, if you're a fan you might still get a kick out of it.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

If you've played the original or love the franchise, you'll definitely get some enjoyment out of *The Battle Of Argus.* Everyone else is likely to get frustrated by its many shortcomings.

» Scores

Presentation	60%
Graphics	71%
Sound	82%
Playability	55%
Addictivity	50%
Overall	**58%**

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews



Ah, the summer… when the weather is (mostly) nice, families head to the seaside towns to cover each other in suntan cream, sand or ice cream, and the homebrew scene gets a little quieter than usual because, contrary to popular belief, programmers aren't allergic to sunlight! I am, but I had to find another selection of homebrew for you to enjoy so was inside anyway…



» [C64] Putting the fire shield to good use.



» [C64] Have at thee, knave!

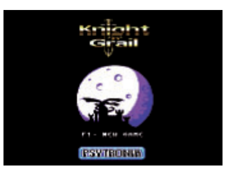




» [C64] The fire shield, hiding in the tower.

IT'S GOT A KNIGHT, A GRAIL AND DRAGONS!

KNIGHT 'N' GRAIL



FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: PSYTRONIK
LINK: WWW.PSYTRONIK.COM
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: £1.99 (DOWNLOAD), £8.99 (BUDGET DISK) OR £12.99 (PREMIUM DISK)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

The plot to *Knight 'N' Grail* opens with a couple having a quiet moment together when, out of the blue, their favourite tree is struck by a bolt of energy and our hero sees his bird magically cursed and transformed into a dragon. The player steps in to help out as, now properly tooled up and ready for battle, said hero boldly enters a conveniently situated evil castle in search of the Holy Grail that he desperately hopes will restore his beloved to her original form.

At a first glance Psytronik's latest release might lead would-be players to believe it's something of a *Ghosts 'N Goblins* clone, what with the 'N' in the title, and it ticks quite a few of the right boxes as well. Girl in peril for the hero to rescue? Check. Evil denizens in a spooky castle? Check. Sword and a suit of armour to go smiting in? Another big tick. But it doesn't take more than a minute of playing to realise that *Knight 'N' Grail* is a very different beast. The pace is far more sedate, for one thing, and while there's enough platform jumping or nasty splattering to keep most action-oriented gamers happy, the primary emphasis is on exploration. The game's map has over 200 locations to meander through and a liberal helping of magical swords, shields and rune stones that bear clues or, in a few cases, act as save points. Even losing all of his energy won't end the protagonist's quest, but it does see him returned to the starting room and robbed of any gold collected.

The swords and armour can be selected at any time, either from the function keys or through the map menu, and some swords are more like guns and launch themselves across the screen or diagonally upwards. Others arc through the air in *Ghosts 'N Goblins* flaming torch fashion, and a couple will even shoot forwards and return like boomerangs. The mystical properties of each weapon mean that their usefulness varies depending on the current adversary, so, for example, the fire armour will protect the wearer from fireballs but ice armour won't. Fortunately, the assailants are colour-coded, so if the selected weapon is the wind sword it's easy to see from an enemy being the same shade of purple that it'll be immune to whatever you're throwing at it.

There's no two ways about it: *Knight 'N' Grail* is a gorgeous game on just about every count. It scores particularly well for visuals, with those colourful backgrounds, silky smooth horizontal scrolling and detailed animation on just about everything that moves, while the sound during play cycles between some reasonable spot effects and an atmospheric soundtrack for each area of the map. While the shifting back and forth between effects and music feels slightly disjointed at first, it does prevent the music becoming stale through overuse. But cosmetics aside, *Knight 'N' Grail* is hugely enjoyable to play, with tight controls, well-designed and sometimes rather devious locations, and some intense bosses.

94%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

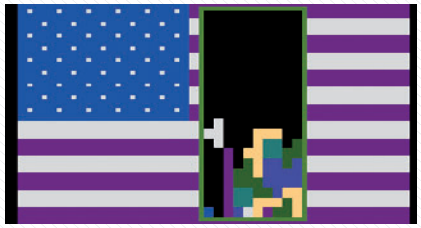
CTETRIS4C REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** HAYDEN DOAN
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.ATARIAGE.COM/FORUMS/ » **PRICE:** FREE

***CTetris4c* was released** just before 4 July to simultaneously celebrate American independence and the 25th anniversary of Alexey Pajitnov's legendary game. As implementations of *Tetris* go, there isn't much of note: the graphics are blocky – not unusual for the play area, but in this case it applies to the entire display – and sound consists of an okay rendition of *Popcorn*, interspersed with effects and the occasional burst of MC Hammer's *U Can't Touch This* on completing a level.

There are options to choose the speed and amount of clutter at the start of play and the controls are reasonable, offering both the ability to manoeuvre the pieces for a moment when they've landed and accelerate their descent, so it's not the worst implementation of the game ever, but there is already a reasonable selection of *Tetris* clones and, apart from having a hard-to-pronounce name, *CTetris4c* doesn't stand out from that crowd.

63%





» [Atari 8-Bit] Terrible score. Must try harder!

PLUMBER

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** ANDREA GASPARRINI
» **DOWNLOAD:** MSXDEV.MSXBLUE.COM » **PRICE:** FREE

This first entry in the MSXdev '09 competition sees you playing as a poor beleaguered plumber, who has been tasked with keeping the water flowing through a pipe. That might appear easy were it not for the four valves, arranged one per floor, that need to be opened, as well as the creatures patrolling some of the floors who don't take kindly to tradesmen, and a truly irritating grey mouse that crops up occasionally to reset one of the valves.

The action is achingly slow and the design is quite frankly broken. Moving on the levels where there are patrolling nasties limits the player to working around them since he has no offensive abilities to speak of, and that little mouse is an utter pain to the point where simply switching the four valves on in the first place becomes a Herculean task, let alone keeping them open for more than a few seconds. Add to that a couple of fairly nasty bugs to contend with and there's little to recommend here.

39%



» [MSX] This is the first level, so that's a score bug!

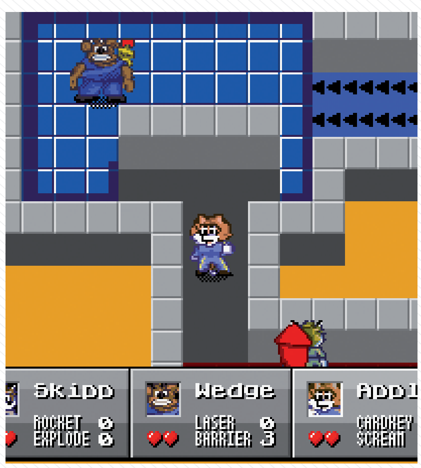
SKIPP AND FRIENDS REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** MUKUNDA JOHNSON, KEN SNYDER, ET AL
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.MUKUNDAZONE.COM » **RELEASE DATE:** 2009 » **PRICE:** FREE

Skipp, Apple and the Wedge are three furry friends who have been abducted while out camping and thrown into the dungeon of a huge spacecraft. In order to escape, they'll have to work together, but only one character can be controlled at a time and each has their own abilities: Skipp has a large rocket strapped to his back and the option to explode, Wedge has a shield and laser gun, and Apple carries door keys and her scream can temporarily immobilise some of the robot guards.

The levels are large, multi-directional affairs and, after a couple of stages, they start to become very sneaky indeed. There are lasers to circumvent, damaged walls to demolish and conveyor belts to ride, and working out which to use and when becomes part of an entertaining, if occasionally slightly frustrating, challenge. Thankfully, there are passwords.

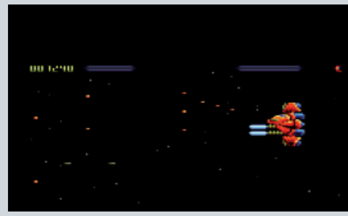
86%



» [SNES] Sadly, SNES homebrew isn't very common these days.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [CPC] *Star Sabre* will soon be available on disk.

» Star Sabre goes floppy!

We've mentioned Paul Kooistra's Amstrad CPC shooter *Star Sabre* a couple of times now, but it's always nice to give it another plug because it really is that deserving! This time the reason for mentioning it is that the 128K version is soon to receive a full 3" disk release courtesy of homebrew powerhouse Psytronik, so a quick squint at its newly re-launched website at **www.psytronik.com** should provide further details.



» [Atari 8-bit] *Gridrunner* is set to reappear very, very soon.

» Keep on (Grid) Running

Karolj 'Heaven' Nadj is currently porting the Jeff Minter unexpanded VIC-20 classic *Gridrunner* to the Atari 8-bit. The A8 already has a version, but the VIC original is considered the definitive article despite or possibly because of chunkier graphics and a more frenetic pace. Considering Nadj's excellent reworking of the VIC code for *Metagalactic Llamas* last year (reviewed back in issue 51) this is one to look forward to.

» The humanoid must not escape

And since we're talking about conversions, it arrived a little too late to review for this issue, but there's *Berzerk Redux* for the C64. The gameplay is faster than the arcade original, but it's all good fun, and the really exciting news is that a supercharged deluxe version is currently in the works.



HOMEBREW

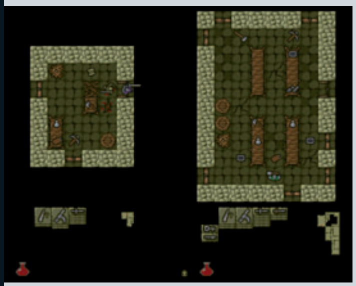
» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» A shadowy flight

The original *Knights* was an Amiga freeware game that pitted two players against each other in various quests within a dungeon, with the unusual twist being that there were only enough objects to allow one player to ultimately win. This new iteration doesn't change the rules of the game and even goes as far as using the Amiga graphics, but along with the split-screen display of the original, it now offers the options of network and internet play. Those who fancy the one-on-one challenge can download *Knights* from **www.knightsgame.org.uk**.

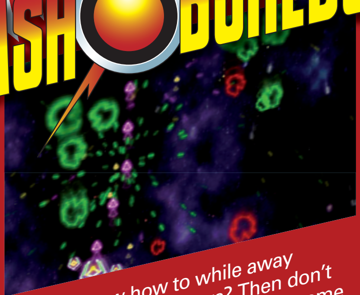


» A game that allows such betrayal as *Knights* seems perfectly suited to online play. Happens all the time…

» On yer bike!

Retro remaker Spraydough has been working on a version of the budget classic *Action Biker*, presumably not featuring a certain brand of snack food, although oddly he's chosen to work from the Spectrum version rather than the more popular isometric effort on the C64 and Atari 8-bit. At the moment it's mostly test graphics and debugging information on the screen, but the map works and it's starting to take shape.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **RetroShoot**

RETROSHOOT DOES EXACTLY what it says on the tin: takes the *Geometry Wars* glowing vector look and transforms it into a mouse-driven scrolling shooter. There's a good selection of attack waves, the play area rotates for some of them, and it even features unlockable mini-games and achievements as well! Find it at **www.retroshoot.com**.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



COBRA FOREVER

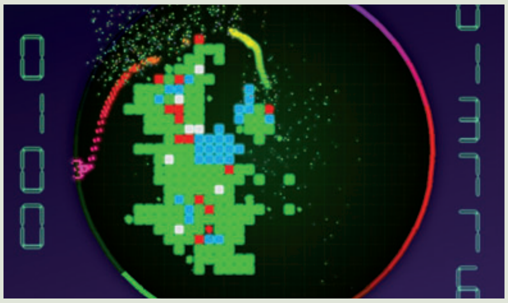
» **DOWNLOAD:** TARDIS.DK/IMAGES/2009/COBRAFOREVER.ZIP



Renegade cop Marion 'Cobra' Cobretti needs to find and then protect a witness who can identify the Night Slasher, head honcho of the gang that's dragging the city towards chaos. But if crime is the disease, this particular cure isn't very effective. Taking its cues from the Spectrum original, *Cobra Forever* starts out so hard that it'd make a nun turn the air blue and doesn't exactly get easier!

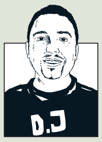
Cobretti can head butt his assailants – guns and other toys can be found within hamburgers dotted around the map – but there's a large number of them, some armed and dangerous and all hard to avoid. If you liked the original then you may find this remake enjoyable, but it's almost guaranteed to drive you slowly mad!

Remake of the Month



MICROBES

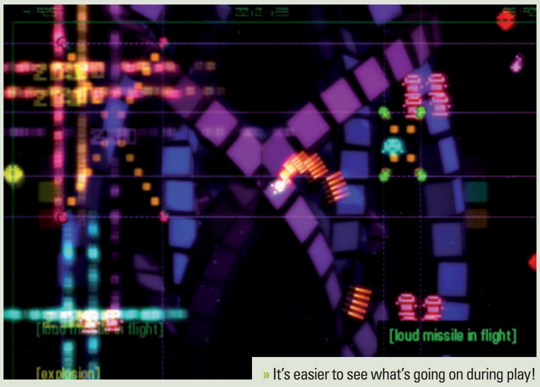
» **DOWNLOAD:** JAYENKAI.SOCODER.NET/?P=203



Microbes… It's hard to believe that something that small could be deadly, but this particular Petri dish is slowly filling with lethal micro organisms. Medical science has a solution, though: a minuscule laser cannon on the rim of the dish! Moving the mouse left and right spins the ship around the edge of the play area, the left button fires the cell-destroying weapon, and holding down the right will put the game into 'bullet time' where everything slows to a crawl but the firing rate increases.

While this remake doesn't replicate every nuance of the Amiga original, it does contain the main elements and that all-important playability. The controls might take some acclimatisation, but after that this is a simple but quite satisfying spot of blasting.





» It's easier to see what's going on during play!

SYNSO 2: SQUID HARDER

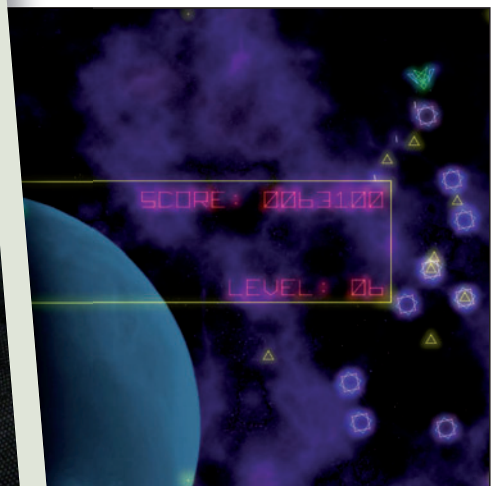
» **DOWNLOAD:** BAGFULLOFWRONG.CO.UK



Four worlds have collided and bedlam has ensued, so the player, taking charge of Squid Yes, Not So Octopus – that's SYNSO to his friends – must wade in and blow several shades of faecal matter out of the creatures now threatening to overrun the multiverse. The aim of the game is mainly to stay alive within the four worlds – shooting and dodging like a lunatic for a mere minute will get SYNSO safely through the first world, while the last requires a show of mad skills for an entire four minutes! And that's a taller order than it might sound, as the player only gets one precious life and the game is out to take it away as soon as possible.

We weren't fans of the first *SYNSO*, but its predecessor, *War Bus*, was among our top five releases of 2008, and, although *SYNSO 2* has far more depth and takes itself a little more seriously, the heritage is obvious. The options of automatic firing and a practice mode that makes it impossible to die have thoughtfully been included, the levels can be played in any order via the selection screen, and after that *SYNSO 2* is a massive slice of very enjoyable, unashamed blasting action with loud sound effects and video pyrotechnics that range from 'over the top' to 'argh, my eyes!' depending on the settings.









» Above: [PC] The graphical inspiration for *Omega Race 2009* is obvious, but it's still a faithful and playable remake.
» Right: [PC] *Spiky Harold* is one of Soren's earlier remakes.

HOMEBREW HEROES

SINCE WE ENJOYED OMEGA RACE 2009 LAST ISSUE AND ARE WAITING PATIENTLY FOR PSYCHO PIGS UXB, IT SEEMED A GREAT TIME TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT AUTHOR **SOREN 'SOKURAH' BORGQUIST** OF TARDIS REMAKES (TARDIS.DK)

Retro Gamer: So, what first drew you into programming and to remaking games in particular?
Soren Borgquist: My story is pretty similar to what many other remakers say: I've loved playing games since I discovered *Pong* and wanted to make games since I got my first computer, a ZX Spectrum. I even had friends come up with ideas and graphics for games, but I'm a bit of a scatterbrain so I never actually followed through and completed anything. But today you have a choice of more and better tools than ever, which allows you to turn your ideas into reality and make games more easily than before. Doing remakes is a way to pay tribute to the old games you love and to see if you're good enough to figure out how to do the same things the programmers did back then and, if possible, even improve on them.

RG: What sort of challenges do you feel are presented by developing remakes?
SB: It's funny, but even though it's just a hobby there's a growing list of things a game is 'required' to have to be of acceptable quality – at Retro Remakes, anyway. You need joystick control, redefinable keys, music, a certain way of navigating menus and all sorts of other small things. They're all making the games better, of course, and you're usually told if you try to get away with less, but most of all it's a challenge to see if you can figure out the technical stuff and then find the time and motivation to make a really good game of it.

RG: And what would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of the process?
SB: When half your code is done and you start connecting all the separate functions and see everything come together into something that not just looks like a game but also starts to play like one. This is probably when the game is between 50 per cent and 90 per cent finished. Very exciting. The most difficult part is the final 10 per cent; you're really feeling the pressure by then, but if you've done a good job then you'll get good feedback and it'll be completely worth it.

RG: Your recent release, *Omega Race 2009*, was your second go at remaking Midway's classic. What prompted that return to it?
SB: I love the game and I used to be proud of the first version, but when I returned to play it after a while I was a bit disappointed. Too bouncy and uses keys all over the keyboard. So after I did *Zektor* and *Space Fury* I thought, 'Why not remake it again and make it as good as I can… and prettier' like those two, and I'm quite happy with how it turned out.

HIGH FIVE

Tell us about your top five favourite new Spectrum games

1 Atic Atac (Richard Jordan of Retrospec) I can only hope to be able to make such a beautiful and perfect game myself one day.

2 Sentry (Emmanuel Icart) A remake of a *Sentinel* remake, with really great gameplay.

3 Jet Set Willy Online (Ovine By Design) Okay, I haven't played it in ages, but it gets top marks for being a brilliant idea and perfectly executed.

4 3D Starstrike (Urban Interactive) I should give up remaking. How can I compete with that? Super polished and super playable.

5 Thrust Xtreme (Wiebo de Wit) Gorgeous and glowy. How can one not love it?

RG: You have an extensive back catalogue. Which would be the game you're most proud of and why?
SB: I guess it's a tie between *Rip-Off* and the new version of *Omega Race*. *Rip-Off* was the first vector game I did – the first version of *Omega Race* looked like vector graphics but wasn't – and is very close to the original, which is one of my all-time favourites. Recently I even received a mail from Tim Skelly, programmer of the original arcade game, who told me "good job" about the remake.

RG: And which games have you not had a go at remaking that you'd like to find time for?
SB: *The Sentinel*. I love it. Years ago I spent ages disassembling the Spectrum version hoping to isolate the algorithm for generating the levels but failed, and if I can't figure out how to remake it with the original levels I wouldn't even begin. Anyone?

RG: Where do you think the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
SB: I think that when you take a lot of creative people who love old games and have always dreamed of making their own, and give them a good and supportive community where they can ask for advice and get good feedback, magic happens. And everyone likes free games.

RG: Finally, which one is your favourite Doctor Who?
SB: Tom Baker, but there's something to love about all of them. I really like David Tennant, but I honestly haven't been too happy with the writing on the new series – it's mostly non-stop action and almost no adventure any more, so I'm really looking forward to seeing what kind of stories Steven Moffat will bring us next year.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» **Looking for a lightgun that works on HD TVs? How does this one grab you? Be warned though, it's not compatible with Dreamcast.**

GUN CRIME

Dear Retro Gamer,
Quick question: do you know where I can buy a lightgun for my Dreamcast that will work with my high-definition television?
Cheers
Peter Jones, email

Sadly, we don't know of any for Dreamcast. However, if anyone is looking for a lightgun for current-gen machines, which is compatible with HD TVs there's this one from PlayAsia.com http://www.play-asia.com/paOS-13-71-1i-49-en-70-2vss.html. If anyone knows where Peter can find a Dreamcast lightgun that will work on his snazzy new telly, please drop us a line via the forum or email.

OH CD!

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just received issue 65 of **Retro Gamer** here in the States and while reading the letters I saw Ross Jaeger's question about how to play the floppy version of *Flashback* on his CD32. The reply said that he just needed a disk drive to play the game, but he actually needs more than that. There is no way to connect a disk drive to a standard CD32 (maybe the person who answered the question was thinking about the CDTV). If he has a rare SX-1 (or the SX32, I think) connected to his CD32 then he can connect a floppy. Alternatively, if he uses one of the multi-game compilations for the CD32, *Flashback* is included on the CD. An easier and cheaper way though, would be to just purchase a used Amiga 500.
Adam Trionfo, New Mexico, USA

Hi Adam. We've spoken to the person in question and he was indeed referring to the CDTV, which is how the mix-up occurred. Thanks for clearing that up. Hopefully Ross will read your letter, forgive us, and finally get to play *Flashback*… one way or another.

STAR LETTER

ARRIVING IN LAS VEGAS

Dear Retro Gamer,
First, let me congratulate you on another magnificent edition of **Retro Gamer** (issue 65). I read your fine magazine during my flight to Las Vegas. In particular, I loved the feature on *Castle Of Illusion*. And this reminded me of what a truly fantastic game it was. It was the first one I ever played on my Mega Drive. Luckily, I had my homebrew-enabled PSP with me on the flight and was once again able to play this excellent game through to completion.

Anyway, while in Vegas, I thought what better way to repay you than to spread the word round the massive Gameworks Arcade where I played some Sega arcade games that I'd never even heard of before – *Sega Rally 3*, *Sega Water Ski*, and *Sega Brave Firefighters*. On the way to the arcade, who should I bump into but none other than the famous blue mascot himself – yes, Sonic the Hedgehog. His entourage were particular pleased to read your magazine and were rather excited at the thought of maybe getting his picture printed in your mag. "Quick, let's get a picture for the UK," I heard them say.
Keep up the good work.
Aaron White

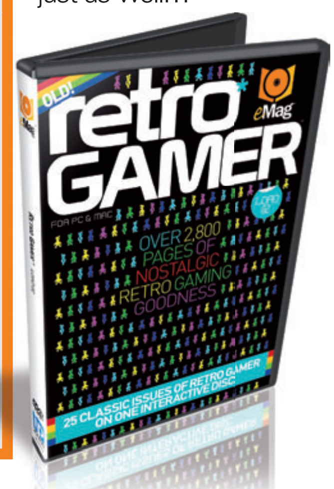


» **We're meant to believe a guy who spends his days dressed as Sonic has never heard of Retro Gamer.**

We're always happy when our old pal Sonic appears in the magazine, Aaron, though he looks far bigger in the flesh. In fact, his head is actually bigger than your head and torso. Anyway, we are really pleased with the response to our new 'Let's All Play' feature, it's gone down very well with many readers. Most of the credit however, must go to those who took time out to get involved and give us such great feedback. So give yourselves a pat on the back.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



MAJOR DOS-FUNCTION

Dear Retro Gamer,
I'd just like to say, I loved the articles on *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Duke Nukem Atomic Edition* in Issue 65. However, I do have one request: can you do an article on how to get these old games running on a bog-standard Vista PC? I have the *Doom Collection* but none of it will run on Vista as far as I can see. I have heard of something called DOS Box but I have no idea what it is or if it would solve the problem. Over to you please.
Steve, email

DOS Box is basically an emulator for Windows that allows modern computers



» **Steve enjoyed our Making Of *Wolfenstein 3D* in issue 65, and is now looking for a way to play it on his new computer.**



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next Month: Gary Bracey



>> BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check into hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

to play early DOS PC games. DOS Box is compatible with Windows Vista, and if you need any further info about the program, or experience any troubles getting it going, we recommend you take a trip to http://vogons.zetafleet.com/index.php?c=7, which is a dedicated DOS Box forum.

CHEAP AND LAZY?

Hi Retro Gamer,
Okay, first off I would like to say thanks for such an excellent mag. I have been following you guys since your first ever issue (which, incidentally, cost me quite a few quid on eBay) and I am now a monthly subscriber. I'd like to say that over the years I have enjoyed all of the subtle changes you have made to the magazine. The new layouts and features, even digging up Iain Lee for a few words – it's all good. However, I do have a niggle with one of your features. How come your Cheap As Chips budget gaming feature never, ever mentions the price of the reviewed game? All of your Retro Revival reviews give an estimated price of the game, but the one feature you do that is actually based upon getting some value for money has no mention of the price. Come on, guys, get it together.

Best regards

Steve Erickson, email

The reason we don't include the price in the Cheap As Chips feature is that, as the introduction points out, all of the games appearing in this section can be picked up for less than a fiver. Therefore, we've always considered the inclusion of an approximate price a little pointless.



>> Nick is desperately seeking like-minded retro gamers from Australia, he enjoys long walks on the beach and diving into Sydney Harbour.

SLEEPLESS IN SYDNEY

Dear Retro Gamer,
You're doing a fantastic job with the mag, it just keeps getting better and better. I have a dilemma that you might be able to solve. I'm a Sega and Atari ST gamer, but a fairly lonely one. I was wondering if you could put a post out for any like-minded gamers in Melbourne, Australia. It would be great to be able to play these nostalgic games with others, rather than on my own. Thanks and keep up the good work, guys. You rock.

Nick Moudios, Australia

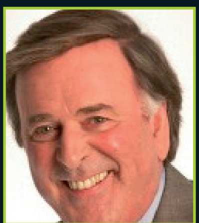
We have noticed that quite a few of our newer forum members hail from Australia, so why not register and leave a post asking for any Aussie retro gaming enthusiasts to get in touch. Perhaps you could organise a mini Australian Retro Gamer event with other readers? If you do, make sure you send us some pictures, and we'll put them in the mag.

> "I know this is a weird request, but why don't you take screenshots using a camera and a good old tube TV"

WHY DON'T YOU TUBE?

Dear Retro Gamer,
I know this might sound like a weird request, but why don't you take your screenshots using a camera and a good old tube television, instead of grabbing the images through emulators? Assuming that the delightful effect of the blurred pixels showed by a cathodic TV is part and parcel of the 8- to 16-bit graphic beauty, it would give the magazine an irresistible retro feeling like the old *Zzap!* or *Computer & Video Games* magazines. Even if you don't follow my suggestion, you'll still be my favourite magazine. >>

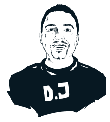
RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Lee Tatlock
Joined:	29 June 2009
Location:	Northwest UK
Occupation:	Graphic Designer
Website:	Not given
Fave Games System:	Master System

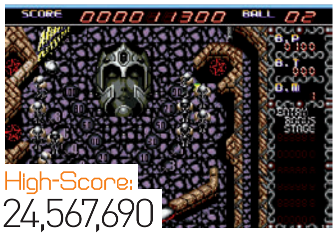
BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: DRAGON'S FURY
Why I picked it: It's just a superb pinball game and plays brilliantly.
Handy advice: Clear the special tables. Obvious, but a sure way to rack up the high scores.

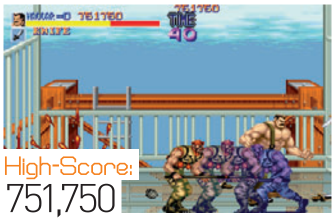


High-Score: 24,567,690

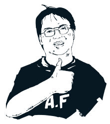


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: FINAL FIGHT
Why I picked it: I just fancied booting up the old girl and seeing how far I could get with one credit.
Handy advice: Collect crap on the floor, including food and used gum. Ill hygiene scores big here.



High-Score: 751,750



ANDREW

CHOSEN GAME: ZOO MANIA (C64)
Why I picked it: Well, it's the Flash/DS puzzle game on the C64. What's not to like?
Handy advice: Make use of the wildcards and aim for combos.



High-Score: 95,334

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite top-down racer and why?

HEAVYface *Neo Drift Out*. It gets all the slidey/grippy stuff right and feels like a 2D *Sega Rally*.

Bub&Bob It's almost *BMX Simulator* on C64 as it was the first one I had played (excluding *Race*, which came free with the Vic20). But I'll go for *Super Sprint* in the arcade. It's just great multiplayer fun.

thl *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* on Mega Drive. The introduction of the J-Cart makes multiplayer even more fun for everybody.

SirClive Definitely Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's *Super Off Road*. It took the simple *Super Sprint* formula and added in bumps, jumps, hills and thrills. On the three-player arcade cab this was nothing short of awesome.

Antiriad2097 *Micro Machines*, for bringing me back to many moments of manoeuvrable multiplayer mayhem.

Greyfox For me it's the one and only *Spy Hunter*. Simply brilliant stuff, it was addictive with a great variety of gameplay unmatched by any other top-down driving game. Guns, missiles and oil slicks are a winning combination.

Scapegoat *Rally Speedway* for the Atari 8-bit. One of the best two-player racing games ever.

Rinoa It would have to be *Micro Machines* for me, too. Having a night in with your mates and a few beers, this game is utter madness.

ipmarks *Super Sprint*. I was never happier than when playing that game in the arcades with friends, spinning the steering wheel wildly, and trying to collect power ups, timing barrier openings. Still play it today on MAME, but it's not the same without the cabinet or the friends.

STranger81 The first *Micro Machines* game on Mega Drive. Tragically overlooked in favour of the sequel.

necronom There are so many to choose from. I've spent a lot of time with *Rally Speedway* and *BMX Simulator* on C64, plus *Grand Prix Simulator, Nitro, Super Cars, Micro Machines, Nitro* and many others on the Amiga, but I'll go for *Super Cars II* today. I might pick another one on another day.

paranoid marvin Thanks to Stu Campbell's recommendation in issue 49, and due to extended play in the Retroleague, I can definitely say that *Road Fighter* is the most frantic, rewarding and downright exhilarating top-down racer I've ever played.

neuromancer *Indy 500* on the venerable VCS will always have a place in my heart. The racing paddle controllers made this something special.

Smurph I'd love to say *Action Fighter* on Master System, but it's really a shooter, similar to *Spy Hunter*. Probably *Super Sprint* in the arcade, with that awesome spinny wheel.

HalcyonDaze00 *Super Cars 2* (Amiga). A brilliant game and superb in multiplayer. It's great fun blowing up your mate with a missile at the start.

mrspud I preferred *Jupiter's Masterdrive* on Amiga over *Supercars*. It looked slightly wackier, the alien shopkeeper amused me and I enjoyed the time-attack bonus rounds. Really smooth scrolling, varied graphics and fun gameplay made it a winner.

shifter The arcade version of *Super Sprint*. MAME and other conversions will never capture the sensation of spinning the wheel and drifting round corners at a time before drifting was cool. It was annoying waiting for the helicopter when you'd crashed and your pals left you behind. You just knew it was hand in the pocket for more coinage.

Eric *Championship Jet Ski Simulator* (CPC) for its drift steering on water and for the simple but neat wave effect created by your jet ski when accelerating, using just a dozen single pixels.

FatTrucker In the arcade, Sega's *Hot Rod*, with its upgradeable cars, was brilliant fun in four-player. Like *Hyper Sports*, *Pac-Man*, and *Turbo*, it gave every Eighties arcade that intoxicating soundtrack when you walked through the door. At home it has to be *Super Cars II* on ST. *Micro Machines* was great with mates but a bit soulless in single-player.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

GAMING BLUNDERS

Killbot As a kid I let my mother bin my boxed ZX81 with RAM pack. A few years later I swapped my boxed *Super Mario Bros* Game & Watch (current value: about £80) for an unboxed Tomytronic 3D game (current value: about 80p).

The Angry Jock Seemingly misplacing all my PSone memory cards and SNES games. I think they went to the tip during the move last year.

Space Turnip It has to be my Speccy being sold as a kid, too. My lovely 128K must have had over 200 games. Probably sold it all for less than £40.

thevulture Paying full whack for a Mega-CD and Atari Jaguar at launch. Epic fails, the pair. Was going through my 'must buy on day of release' stage back then. Dreamcast was *the* last machine I picked up on launch day.

STranger81 Putting my Dreamcast, 20 games, three pads, two VMUs, fishing rod, keyboard, mouse and lightgun in a skip when I had a clearout two years ago because I was bored of it.

GAME TWISTS

David *X-Men* on Mega Drive. When you get to the end it says you have to reset the computer, but it turns out you have to press Reset on the Mega Drive to complete the game.

hydr0x *The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*. Actually having to close your DS to press some object into another.

thevulture *Silent Hill 2*. Wander around for too long with low health after the twist has kicked in and the game decides you're suicidal and kills you off.

STranger81 I've always loved the twist at the end of *Double Dragon* where if the game is completed in co-op you have to fight your mate for the girl at the end.

flying_delorean81 Near the end of *Streets Of Rage* the boss makes you an offer and your decision can mean you get sent back to do the last couple of levels over again.

FORGOTTEN FIGHTERS

Shinobi *Violent Storm* is awesome. I remember the bosses 'Fast Freddy' who was like a skinny Blanka, and that statue that came to life.

Devious One of the most memorable is in *Kasumi Ninja* for the Jaguar. The guy says, in an exaggerated oriental accent, "Show no mercy!"

Yethboth *Mutation Nation* on Neo Geo is a decent but forgotten fighter to look out for.

woody.cool What about *Fist Fighter* on Amiga? That was an amazingly bad game.

gman72 Has anyone mentioned *Hot Blooded Family* on PSone/Saturn. It was a class little *Final Fight/Streets Of Rage* clone with some nice graphics and music. Check it out.

Retrogarden *Way Of The Warrior* for 3DO. An average *MK* clone but with a few nice features.

Old vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Bionic Commando* is your favourite?

Bionic Commando (Arcade Version)



Bionic Commando (360/PS3 Version)



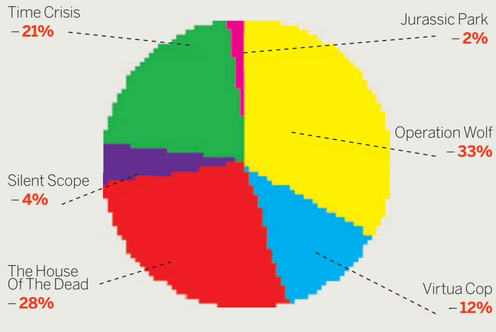
89% | 11%

thevulture It's arcade for me. On PS3 it was too linear.

Zetr0 The new *BC* is awesome. I'm in love with it.

HOT TOPIC

Let us know your favourite arcade gun game and why?



"It has to be *Op Wolf*. Great game. Would never vote for *Time Crisis*, spending half your time hiding behind objects is just wrong." **– paranoid marvin**

"Although *Op Wolf* is a true classic, I thought *Time Crisis* refined the lightgun genre. That and the *Virtua Cop* series made them fun again." **– The Loafer**

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Cheers from your greatest Italian fan.
Luca Siracusa, email

Obviously, we would never revert back to the old way of taking screenshots. The main reason we use screen grabs is simply convenience. Taking screenshots using a camera would be too laborious, not to mention a nightmare for our designer, Steve.

BACK ISSUE

Dear Retro Gamer,
Your magazine is the best I've ever read. I'm totally addicted to it. But I have a problem. I only have a few editions and it's almost impossible to obtain back issues. Last week I bought numbers 55, 57 and 61 from the Imagine eStore, but they were only available for a few hours. My question is, would it be possible to reprint back issues? I think that, due to the high demand on items, it could be a success. I know there are currently two compilations on DVD, but the first one is out of stock, and I prefer reading on paper than on a computer screen.
Diego Torres Rodriguez

Sadly, Diego, at the moment we have no plans to produce reprints of previous Retro Gamer issues or the first eMag, but that may well change. Keep checking the blog and Retro Gamer website for updates and rumblings from the RG office. Meanwhile, our only other suggestion would be to try and track down the issues you want through eBay, or perhaps contact readers directly through the forum to see if they have any spare copies they would be willing to sell to you.

SILENT BUT BRILLIANT

Dear Retro Gamer,
I love your magazine because it's the only place to learn about all the histories of the games I used to play as a kid. I do have to say, though, that it's high time you covered Konami's *Silent Hill*, especially as the new game is out now. I know a lot of the games featured in **Retro Gamer** date from the Eighties and early-Nineties, but I still think there is a rich and colourful history to the *Silent Hill* series that helped capture the imaginations of gamers all over the world. It was arguably the first genuinely scary game, with its frights relying on immersing the gamer in a relentlessly tense and uncomfortable atmosphere. Its enemies were also the stuff of truly terrifying nightmares.

The first two games were definitely the best, as the later releases sacrificed atmosphere for combat and longevity. Still, the series is still going strong today, with the fifth game about to be released on PlayStation 3. Gamers had never experienced anything like this before and it deserves a thorough analysis, from early screenshots, reviews, characters, plot and not forgetting the infamous film and Pyramid Head.
Michael Dunphy, email

We have covered the original *Silent Hill* as a classic videogame, but you're right, it would be nice to revisit the original and find out how the developers managed to pull off such a terrifying game. Maybe we'll wait until *Silent Hill VI* is released.


RG readers can look forward to an in-depth look-back at the unnerving *Silent Hill* series.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

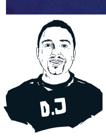
Mr & Mrs Steve

This month our designer, Steve, got married. He tells us the day went swimmingly. Rings were exchanged, 'I will' was muttered and the disco was "top drawer" – his words, not ours. As Darran is already married, he felt it his obligation to spend the entire month trying to dissuade Steve from going through with it. Stuart, meanwhile, was trying his level best to persuade Steve to have a retro-themed shindig at Monkey Island, on the Thames in Maidenhead. Steve is now back after enjoying his honeymoon in Sardinia and ignoring Darran and Stuart.

> "Silent Hill immersed gamers in a relentlessly tense atmosphere"

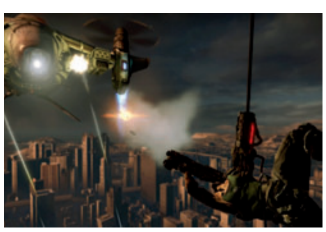
CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

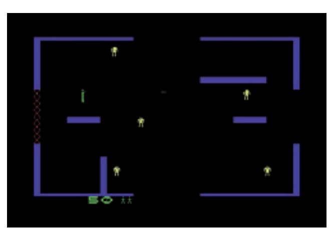
Aquanaut's Holiday
Only available in the Far East right now, this is a remake of the original *Aquanaut's Holiday* on PSone. You don't do much, but the beautiful music and sheer number of fish to discover make it one of the most relaxing games on PS3.





STUART

Bionic Commando
Grin should be commended for doing such an impressive job of rebooting the franchise with this great update of the arcade and NES classic. It has great controls, lavish visuals and offers a refreshing challenge. Snap this up.





ANDREW

Berzerk Redux (C64)
A fantastic conversion of the arcade game by Martin Piper, this even includes the "Coin detected in pocket" speech on the attract mode. I followed this one throughout its (rapid) development during June 2009.

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House 33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team
Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Rick Porter**
Senior Designer **Stephen Williams**
Staff Writer **Stuart Hunt**
Senior Sub Editor **Helen Laidlaw**
Sub Editor **Olly Dean**
Senior Art Editor **Greg Whitaker**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Mike Bevan, Richard Burton, David Crookes, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, Andrew Fisher, Craig Grannell, Jason Kelk, Damien McFerran, Gabriel McGrath, Matt Reynolds, Trevor Storey, John Szczepaniak, Mike Tooley

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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Commercial Director Ross Webster
☎ 01202 586418
ross.webster@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Head of Sales James Hanslip
☎ 01202 586423
james.hanslip@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Advertising Manager James Haley
☎ 01202 586432
james.haley@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Salesperson of the Year
JAMES HALEY
Advertising Sales Executive Madeleine Jones
☎ 01202 586417
madeleine.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Classified Sales Executive Kriss Scott
☎ 01202 586420
kriss.scott@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
International Manager Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Subscriptions Manager Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
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Circulation
Circulation & Export Manager Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Managing Director Damian Butt
Finance Director Steven Boyd
Creative Director Mark Kendrick

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NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 10 SEPT 2009

GET YOUR ROCKS OFF!

We speak exclusively to Ed Logg about Asteroids, one of gaming's most iconic and influential shoot-'em-ups

OTHER EXCITING FEATURES

Space tourist Richard Garriott returns from his other-worldly voyage to look back at the *Ultima* series, one of the oldest RPG franchises of all time.

So, was Tiger Electronics' Game.com handheld a complete failure or lightyears ahead of its time? Find out next month when we speak to its developer.

Namco's polygon blaster *StarBlade* blew gamers away in 1991. Discover how it came to be in an exclusive new interview with the game's creator.

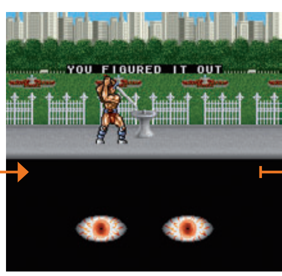


TRIO THE PUNCH – NEVER FORGET ME

Data East's *Trio The Punch – Never Forget Me* is widely regarded as the strangest videogame in existence. None of it makes any sense whatsoever, even with the aid of psychic abilities to actually tap into the developer's head and buy a ticket for their train of thought.



SCREEN 1
So, the last level is set in a peaceful-looking park. You finish the game and get the usual 'win win' message. Nothing out of the ordinary there, right?



SCREEN 2
But wait, it tells us we've figured something out. Oh right, a pair of bloodshot eyes appear underground. Nope, haven't quite figured it out yet.



SCREEN 3
Ah clever, the ground rises and our hero becomes the size of gorilla's brain. Now it all makes sense. We were fighting on a soil monster's head.



SCREEN 4
But it's okay, the creature sinks back into the ground and, judging from how our man is still hanging in the air with his arm raised, with very little warning.



SCREEN 5
Let's hope this text explains the last hour? Er, what's great? What's the best you ever had? What the hell are you jerks on about? Worst ending ever.